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**THE AESTHETICS OF CLASS
IN POST-WAR BRITAIN**

by

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degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Social History**

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Declaration

This thesis is the work of Paul Leslie Long. It has not been submitted in fulfilment of any other degree at any other university.

ABSTRACT

Existing histories of post-war Britain offer limited perspectives on how, why and where working-class culture became the subject that Raymond Williams described as ‘a key issue in our own time’. Little of the work that *has* attended to this issue has examined it beyond its anthropological sense as ‘a whole way of life’. In contrast, a concept of the ‘aesthetic’ is enlisted here as an apposite way of approaching the idea of culture in its more limited sense, defined by Williams as ‘the arts and learning - the special processes of discovery and creative effort’. This thesis locates the issue of working-class culture in the context of the post-war settlement as an aspect of the *mentalités* of Welfare State Britain. It suggests that there was a re-imagining of the majority as part of a wider, democratic reconceptualisation of the public and cultural spheres. This idea is explored through the study of a range of contemporaneous projects designed to describe, validate, reclaim, rejuvenate and indeed generate an ‘authentic’ working-class culture. These projects include the wartime activities of the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA), the post-war Folk Revival, the work of Richard Hoggart, radio producer Charles Parker, Arnold Wesker’s Centre 42 project and how creative practices pursued in post-war education engaged with concepts of working-class culture. The aesthetic framework is enlisted also to the framing of the discourses, assumptions and idealism that impelled these projects. What is revealed are the historically specific conceptualisations of class, culture and politics that informed and limited this work, the Utopian ambition behind it and the manner in which ordinary people were represented and encouraged to represent themselves.

Preface and Acknowledgements.

In this thesis I explore the ideas behind a variety of projects designed to locate, validate and generate working-class cultural expression. One contention is that these, and many other approaches to the issue of class and culture, have been directed by generic conventions. Some of this is detectable in the writing of academics who identify themselves *as* working class, or *from* a working-class background. When they write about this issue, their work often includes an autobiographical element. Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams, Jeremy Seabrook, Carolyn Steedman, Valerie Walkerdine and Beverly Skeggs are all names that spring to mind here. Sometimes, autobiography is enlisted in order to establish an author's credentials, authenticity or even *possession* of his or her subject. An issue that arises in discussions of class is exactly what the working class is, has been, or could be, and who is authorised to determine the integrity of its character. When autobiographical detail is presented it is often insightful and highly affecting. Sometimes heart breaking, it can also be gut-wrenchingly embarrassing too. This is not so much to do with any particular detail, but the careful and earnest phrasing that surrounds it, whatever the motives and rationale behind the exposure of the past.

My own desire for 'possession' of my subject probably directs my feelings here about approaches to class; that, or a sense of commitment, sentimentality, guilt, shame, objectification, romanticism, celebration, treachery - all terms that register in the corpus of writing *about* working-class life and its reception. During the period of

research for this thesis I have been taken to task for my use of the term working *classes* rather than class, and encountered a group of tough-looking, young, northern academics pronounce upon the validity of Marxist dialectics and the continuing pertinence of the class struggle. I have also been scorned by a panel of cultural studies academics, apparently for being stuck in the past: this is as profound a misunderstanding of my project as I hope to encounter.

It is conventional then, for authors to announce *why* they came to write about class, or how it came to be an issue for them. My rationale has been formed out of the notable *absence* of class as a topic at all. I entered higher education on a Ruskin bursary at an adult education college that had taught working men for over one hundred years. Once upon a time this was the kind of place one went to in order to acquire ‘really useful knowledge’, to develop a consciousness of what it was to belong to the working classes and a progressive labour movement; no longer, or not in the same way. Training was aimed at imparting ‘transferable skills’, or hopefully preparation for university; there was little connection between what was taught and the history of the institution.

I went on to study Film, a field that admittedly has had little space for class. A recent contribution to the discipline describes this category as ‘The Hidden Foundation’ and the introductory question pointedly asks: ‘Is There Class in This Text?’¹ Nonetheless, it was in Film that I acquired the equipment necessary for identifying ideas, cultural work and representations that were ‘bourgeois’. I was also impressed by the romanticism of artists and artistic movements that have believed it

¹ David E. James and Rick Berg (eds), The Hidden Foundation: Cinema and the Question of Class, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London, 1996.

possible to produce radically aligned work that would change the world (whatever the evidence to the contrary). Thereafter, I pursued a Master's Degree in Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham. This was the location of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, a site that was key to its development as a 'field formed by social class'; not that you would notice.² Gender, ethnicity, sexuality, even 'whiteness' were amongst the consumer friendly categories in favour, some to be worn with pride, others to be 'interrogated' and put in the dock for their terroristic totalisations.³ Incidentally, there was also little interest in Culture in the specific sense of expressive works of art.

I came to the Centre for Social History hoping to make more sense of class and culture and their conjunction. It came as something of a shock to find that class as a category was still of interest, and a profitable basis of research. Yet at the same time, and as I discuss in my introduction, the status of class as a foundational category, and the politics it informed, was under scrutiny from Historians. A signal event occurred when the Centre itself, a site of repute and so much valuable work concerned with class, was dissolved within a year of my arrival.

These anecdotes serve only to underline the fluctuating fortunes of class as a category; they are not intended as a lament. Whether heroes of their own narrative or not, the working class have been afforded an interest from academics that has waxed and waned in the last half-century. In 1968 Brian Jackson reflected upon 'that debate

² Sally R. Munt (ed.), Cultural Studies and the Working Class: Subject to Change, Cassell, London, 2000, p. 1.

³ On a similar point see Stefan Collini, English Pasts: Essays in History and Culture, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999, p. 257.

on working-class life which blazed up, and died down so very quickly'.⁴ Within Film Studies, and from an American perspective, David James has tracked the way in which the 'micropolitics' generated by of the movements of the 1960s undermined the status of class within the academy itself.⁵ More recently, Sally Munt has overseen a collection highlighting 'The Theme That Dare Not Speak Its Name', in order to announce 'the *return* of class as an analytical category'.⁶

My concern here is with the historicisation of concepts of class and the way in which it has authorised a vast body of ideas and projects designed to give voice to the disenfranchised. I am in awe of the faith and commitment expressed by those individuals encountered hereafter, whether it be to an idea of the working class, social justice or simply an idea of the value of art and culture. Whatever my desire to explore the prescriptive nature of their work and its often limiting assumptions, there are still reasons to celebrate and appreciate the genuine contribution they have made to how we think about the world and how it is ordered. I am highly conscious of how my own work is qualified in some way by all of that which I seek to frame, and how my own assumption of an autobiographical voice is indebted to them.

More immediately, my thanks are due to Michael Green of the Department of Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham - he encouraged this project, although it had radically different aims when formulated. Likewise, thanks to Malika Mehdid and David Parker especially, for some insightful discussion and fruitful collaboration. Thanks to Pam Bishop of the Charles Parker Archive and the staff of

⁴ Brian Jackson, Working Class Community: Some General Notions Raised by a Series of Studies in Northern England, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1968, p. 4.

⁵ David James, 'Introduction: Is There Class in This Text?' in James and Berg (eds), The Hidden Foundation, pp. 1-25.

Birmingham Central Library, particularly Fiona Tait. Also, to the staff of the libraries of Birmingham University, Hull University, the University of Warwick and the Modern Records Centre. My gratitude also to the staff of the Public Records Office, The Victoria and Albert Museum and the Arts Council of England. I have benefited immensely from my involvement with the 'Public History Seminar' at Ruskin College Oxford; my thanks to Hilda Kean for many valuable insights, exchanges and opportunities. Similarly, my work was aided by the chance to speak at 'The Fourth Biennial Conference of the Center for Working-Class Studies' at Youngstown State University, Ohio, USA. Special thanks those in attendance, especially Naomi Parry, *and* the Department of History of the University of Warwick for supporting me financially. I am indebted in various ways to James Vincent, Fred Inglis, Duncan Hall, Tony Mason, Rachel Moseley, Jason Jacobs, David Watts, Neil Hollins, Robert Long, Lara Ratnaraja, Ros Lucas and Tim Wall. Many people offered me time and the opportunity to trouble their memories, even if I have not fully capitalised on their input in the development of this thesis: Mary Baker, Clive Barker and Beryl and Manny Ruehl all deserve acknowledgement.

Above all, I would like to thank Professor Carolyn Steedman who has been generous and indulgent with her insights yet admirably tough, encouraging and sympathetic in her supervisory role. My gratitude to her for sending me in creative directions that have made researching and writing this dissertation worthwhile, for me and hopefully for the reader too. This work is dedicated to Martha Lily, whose

⁶ Munt, 'Introduction' in Cultural Studies and the Working Class, p. 13. The phrase comes from the title of Roger Bromley's essay in the same collection, pp. 51-68.

arrival brought me immeasurable happiness and wealth, and to Debra Jayne Norman for perseverance, friendship and love.

Paul Long,

Birmingham.

September, 2001.

List of Abbreviations

ABCA: Army Bureau of Current Affairs.

ACTT: Association of Cinematograph, Television and Allied Technicians.

AESD: Association of Engineering and Shipbuilding Draughtsmen.

AEU: Amalgamated Engineering Union.

BCA: Bureau of Current Affairs.

BFI: British Film Institute.

CACE: Central Advisory Council for Education.

CCCS: Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies.

CEMA: Council for the Encouragement of the Music and the Arts.

CND: Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.

CPA: Charles Parker Archive.

CPGB: Communist Party of Great Britain.

EFDSS: English Folk Dance and Song Society.

ENSA: Entertainments and National Service Association.

ILEA: Inner London Education Authority.

JMB: Joint Matriculation Board.

LEA: Local Education Authority.

MOI: Ministry of Information,

MRC: Modern Records Centre.

NATE: National Association of Teachers of English.

NCB: National Coal Board.

NCTE: National Council for the Teaching of English.

RP: Received Pronunciation.

SAU: Students' Action Group.

TGWU: Transport and General Workers' Union.

TUC: Trades Union Congress.

TX: Transmission date.

WEA: Workers' Education Authority.

WMA: Workers' Music Association.

WTM: Workers' Theatre Movement.

YCL: Young Communists League.

Introduction.

Historicising Class and Culture.

‘This is the age of the common man alright’.¹

Culture was the way in which the process of education, the experience of literature, and - for someone moving out of a working-class family to a higher education - inequality, came through ... This is, I think, still the most important way to follow the argument about culture, because everywhere, but very specifically in England, culture is one way in which class, the fact of major divisions between men, shows itself.²

In a recent polemic Terry Eagleton damns the impossibly relativistic ‘culturalism’ of contemporary thought as politically quiescent. His concern is with an idea of the postmodern and the expansion of the market into the culture industry in the 1970s and 1980s, a development in which contemporary cultural theory is implicated and compromised. For him, postmodernism has signalled ‘that the old-style *Kulturkampf* between minority civilization and mass barbarism was now officially over’.³ Still a sterling opponent of elitism, he suggests that during the 1960s the ideological underpinnings of high art were undermined by the challenge of populist and

¹ ‘The Things They Say’ (Advertisement for ICI), The Times, 7 July 1958, p. 5.

² Raymond Williams, ‘Culture and Revolution: a Comment’ in Terry Eagleton and Brian Wicker (eds), From Culture to Revolution: The Slant Symposium 1967, Sheed and Ward, London and Sydney, 1968, p. 24.

³ Terry Eagleton, The Idea of Culture, Blackwell, Oxford, 2000, p. 125.

subversive tactics but that ‘what had triumphed could no longer quite be captured by either category’.⁴

Elsewhere, another ending of sorts, not altogether unrelated, has been signalled in the question ‘Is there any future for the category of class as a form of historical explanation?’⁵ Here, events such as the collapse of the ‘communist’ Eastern bloc, the inexorable growth of consumerism and the rise of identity politics account for the waning privilege of this analytical category. Similarly, ‘the social’, ‘consciousness’, ‘experience’ and other conceptual tools are subject to inquiry and problematisation, with the additional possibility that class was ‘never as important as social historians have assumed it to have been’.⁶ As Patrick Joyce has commented, Modernity has ‘essentialised’ or reified these concepts, eliding their discursive and historical origins. He adds that:

Modernism is also conceived as writing the “grand narratives” of history in which these various essences play leading roles, for instance the narratives of science and progress, and of liberalism, socialism and conservatism. From a modernist perspective these foundations and narratives confer power because they provide knowledge. In a postmodernist view power creates knowledge, not knowledge power.⁷

Taken together then, it would be possible to conclude from such comments that what has also ended is a particular mode of thinking about these categories in the conjunction ‘working-class culture’. In 1958 it was this concept which Raymond

⁴ Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture*, p.125.

⁵ Kelly Boyd and Rohan McWilliam, ‘Historical Perspectives on Class and Culture’, *Social History*, Vol. 20, No.1, January 1995, p. 93.

⁶ *Ibid.*

Williams identified as 'a key issue in our own time'.⁸ He later described it as 'the preoccupation of a generation'.⁹ By suggesting that this preoccupation with working-class culture is an area that has remained unexamined in any coherent manner, my intention in this thesis is to explore it via a series of case studies. Spanning a period from the Second World War to the mid-1970s these studies investigate a variety of projects that were designed to describe, validate, reclaim, rejuvenate and indeed generate an 'authentic' working-class culture. A concept of the 'aesthetic' is enlisted therefore as an apposite way of approaching particular ideas of culture, as I seek to interpret the discourses, assumptions and idealism that informed these projects. This approach also offers a contribution to recent meditations on the nature of history and cultural theory, particularly arguments like those made by Joyce who calls for the radical historicisation of the categories of thought 'that have served as the basis of our knowledge'.¹⁰ I will define what is meant by the 'aesthetic' and how it is employed, but first it is useful to contextualise the proliferating discourse of working-class culture in relation to the post-war settlement and the way in which its history has been written.

⁷ 'Introduction' in Patrick Joyce (ed.), Class, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 1995, p. 8.

⁸ Raymond Williams, Culture and Society: 1780-1950, Penguin Books, 1961 (first published 1958), p. 307.

⁹ Williams, 'Culture and Revolution: a Comment', p. 24.

¹⁰ Patrick Joyce, 'The End of Social History?', Social History, Vol. 20, No.1, January 1995, p. 74. A series of debates involving Lawrence Stone, Joyce, Catriona Kelly, Gabriel Spiegel, Neville Kirk, Geoff Eley and Keith Nield from the journals Past and Present, History and Theory and Social History are collected and surveyed in Keith Jenkins (ed.), The Postmodern History Reader,

At the end of the Second World War Ernest Bevin wrote to Clement Attlee that 'One thing it should have done is to remove the inferiority complex amongst our people'.¹¹ 'Total War' had involved all in an often desperate effort on behalf of the commonweal, an effort that was assumed to be about more than the preservation of the existing society. The resounding Labour victory in the 1945 election, coupled with the establishment of the Welfare State, constituted an endorsement of the demand for social justice and a more egalitarian, properly democratic world.

There is a substantial literature concerning the wider context for the development of the Welfare State and the post-war settlement, which lately has been described as producing a self-referential historiography. It is suggested that this work operates within regular parameters, reproducing the same terms of inquiry and as such tends to 'deal in a familiar range of social actors and *mise-en-scène*'.¹² Here we can number ideas of 'Bustkellism', 'consensus', and later 'affluence' and 'embourgeoisement'. Whatever the adequacy of these ideas to any understanding of the many descriptions of continuing injustices, it has been suggested that they sustained the Welfare State virtually intact for at least a quarter of a century before their systematic and symbolic deconstruction.¹³ As the Conservative Party election manifesto of 1979 declared: 'the years of make-believe and false optimism are over.

Routledge, London and New York, 1997, pp. 239-383.

¹¹ Quoted in Arthur Marwick, Class: Image and Reality in Britain, France and the USA Since 1930, Collins, London, 1980, p. 229.

¹² Discussed in 'Introduction', in Becky Conekin, Frank Mort and Chris Waters (eds), Moments of Modernity: Reconstructing Britain 1945-1964, Rivers Oram Press, London and New York, 1999, p. 4 (The original reference point here is James Vernon's 'The Mirage of Modernity', Social History, Vol. 22, No. 2, May 1997).

¹³ Derek Fraser describes its decline as beginning in 1973-83, in The Evolution of the British Welfare State: A History of Social Policy Since the Industrial Revolution, (Second Edition) Macmillan, Houndmills, Basingstoke, 1984 (first published 1973), pp. 250-3.

It is time for a new beginning'.¹⁴ And it would be possible to relate the kind of endings that are signalled above to this proclamation, as in some way heralded by the ascendancy of the New Right in the form of Thatcherism and the announcement that there is 'no such thing as society'.¹⁵

While 'it has become respectable for historians ... to write the history of post-war Britain', this is proving to be a highly contested space, not least of all *because* of the ideological purview of the New Right.¹⁶ The parameters of this space are defined by debates about the 'war and social change thesis', in terms of the 'good' or 'bad' effects of the Second World War and the degree of change or continuity that characterised the subsequent fortunes of Britain.¹⁷ Thus, the historiography of the following decades is often concerned with evaluations of the nature of social and economic change and the performance of political actors and their policies. The achievements of Clement Attlee's Labour government and the gains of the post-war settlement have been celebrated in work such as Peter Hennessy's Never Again, while a longer framework of optimism is provided by Peter Clarke in Hope and Glory: Britain 1900-1990.¹⁸ A key figure in the writing of the narrative of national decline is Correlli Barnett whose conclusions are announced in the titles of work such as The Audit of War: the Illusion and Reality of Britain as a Great Nation and The Lost Victory: British Dreams, British Realities 1945-1950.

¹⁴ Quoted in Robert Hewison, Culture and Consensus: England, Art and Politics Since 1940, Methuen, London, 1997, p. 209

¹⁵ Margaret Thatcher, originally quoted in Woman's Own, 31 October 1987, discussed in Margaret Thatcher, The Downing Street Years, Harper Collins, London, 1993, p. 626.

¹⁶ Conekin, Mort and Waters, 'Introduction', p. 3.

¹⁷ E.g. Harold Smith (ed.), War and Social Change: British Society in the Second World War, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1986 and more recently, Harold Smith (ed.), Britain in the Second World War. A Social History, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1996.

¹⁸ Peter Hennessy, Never Again: Britain 1945-51, Jonathan Cape, 1992 and Peter Clarke, Hope and

Barnett argues that the Labour government of 1945 inherited and maintained a commitment to Britain's continued role as a global power yet its fulfilment of the dream of a 'New Jerusalem' 'loaded a second crushing burden on the economy'.¹⁹ Recently, Nick Tiratsoo has complained that such histories accord with the sympathies of rightwing political commentators, i.e. Thatcherites, who 'have created what amounts to a new consensus, a version of events which has percolated into the media and the classroom'. Thus, his edited survey From Blitz to Blair: A New History of Britain Since 1939, was conceived as an interventionist attempt to provide a 'view of British history which is both realistic and balanced'.²⁰

For me, the palpable achievements of Welfare State Britain are affirmed in a felicitous passage in Landscape for a Good Woman where Carolyn Steedman recalls the experience of growing up in Britain in the 1950s. She describes a world where the extension of wartime rationing ensured an adequate diet for all, where prescriptions of vitamins and Virol underwrote the healthy growth of all children. Appreciative of the fair and benign impulse of such a society she writes that: 'I think I would be a very different person now if orange juice and milk and school dinners at school hadn't told me in a covert way, that I had a right to exist, was worth something. My inheritance from those years is the belief ... that I do have a right to the earth'.²¹

Glory: Britain 1900-1990, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1996.

¹⁹ Correlli Barnett, The Lost Victory: British Dreams, British Realities 1945-1950, Macmillan, London, 1995, p. xiv. See also, his, The Audit of War: the Illusion and Reality of Britain as a Great Nation, Macmillan, London 1986, and Andrew Roberts, Eminent Churchillians, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1993, p. 3.

²⁰ Nick Tiratsoo, 'Preface', in From Blitz to Blair: A New History of Britain Since 1939, Phoenix, 1998, p. ix.

²¹ Carolyn Steedman, Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives, Virago, London, 1986, p. 122.

Steedman's suggestive comment offers a way of understanding my approach to the post-war period. She hints at the *mentalités* that arrived with this era of material reorganisation, an idea encapsulated in the ubiquity of that contemporary phrase 'The Age of the Common Man'. This idea can be qualified by mobilising familiar histories of another kind - those of the New Left and the birth of cultural studies - played out as they usually are amongst that triumvirate of Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams and E.P. Thompson.²² Francis Mulhern is surely thinking of these narratives when he writes of the unreflexive quality of current socialist theory and, I might add, much that eschews this label, which views the Fifties as a kind of intellectual cradle. He bemoans the manner in which the triumvirate is located as 'enablers' of a circumscribed and self-referential history rather than as 'actors' on a wider stage. A wider purview would situate and account for the prodigious success and ambit of social history, cultural history, cultural studies, and so on.²³ Thus, Mulhern describes the impact and legacy of the work of Williams, Hoggart and Thompson as the result of a 'benign logic' that endorsed what he labels 'welfare culture'.²⁴ This is an idea affirmed in the title of Robert Hewison's Culture and Consensus (1997), or in Alan Sinfield's observation that 'the post-1945 understanding of culture, the arts and education was formed in the same ideological

²² Attention to this area has proven enormously productive in recent years, e.g. Lin Chun, The British New Left, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1993; Fred Inglis, Raymond Williams, Routledge, London, 1995; Michael Kenny, The First New Left: British Intellectuals After Stalin, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1995; Dennis Dworkin, Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain: History, the New Left, and the Origins of Cultural Studies, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 1997 and Tom Steele, The Emergence of Cultural Studies 1945-65: Cultural Politics, Adult Education and the English Question, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1997. We might also include Richard Hoggart's autobiographical trilogy Life and Times (Vol. I: A Local Habitation; Vol. II: A Sort of Clowning and Vol. III: An Imagined Life; Chatto and Windus, London, 1988-92).

²³ Francis Mulhern, 'A Welfare Culture? Hoggart and Williams in the Fifties', Radical Philosophy, No.77, May/June 1996, p. 26.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 35.

framework as the other main welfare institutions'.²⁵ Here, I am thinking of the democratic consciousness and cultural extension that all of these writers, and many others, have worked out of and have continued to help shape in some way.

Peter Burke has described 'the discovery of the people' that was apparent across eighteenth-century Europe as concepts of culture were defined in terms of discrete categories of high and low, thus distinguishing, producing and reinforcing ideas of difference between social groups.²⁶ As I discuss in the next chapter, the romantic terms of this discovery have been rehearsed again and again over the modern period, but took on a new and productive inflection in the post-war era. In this period a prodigious amount of work was dedicated to addressing questions like those voiced by Dennis Marsden and Brian Jackson in Education and the Working Class (1963): 'is it at all true, as the head-teachers say, that the working class (three quarters of the "nation") bring nothing of their own to meet the cultural inheritance? Are they so "new", so raw, so blank?'.²⁷ The recognition that there *was* such a thing as working-class culture can be considered to have underwritten the rise of Mr. and Mrs. Smith. This couple are the representative ordinary people to whom Robert Blatchford had made his appeals to in Merrie England (1894) on behalf of Socialism only decades before. Thus, for Stefan Collini the importance of a foundational work like Hoggart's The Uses of Literacy (1957) is that it 'can now be seen to have

²⁵ Alan Sinfield, Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1989, p. 58.

²⁶ Peter Burke, 'The "Discovery" of Popular Culture' in Raphael Samuel (ed.), People's History and Socialist Theory, Routledge, London, 1981, p. 216.

²⁷ Brian Jackson and Dennis Marsden, Education and the Working Class: Some General Themes Raised by a Study of 88 Working-Class Children in a Northern Industrial City, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1973 (first published 1962), p. 244.

formed part of a quite general but historically specific theme: it was the “entry into society” of the old urban working class’.²⁸

For socialists, the idea of working-class culture and the recognition of its integrity and value underwrote a politics critical of the ideology of consensus and the compromise implicit in what Sinfield labels ‘welfare-capitalism’.²⁹ Hewison suggests that for dissenters, the boundaries of national identity were at issue. The work of Raymond Williams especially suggested a redefinition of the social that would account for marginalised cultural traditions such as ‘the communitarian values of the working class as opposed to the individualism, tempered by the notions of “service”, of the bourgeoisie’.³⁰ The rethinking of cultural imperatives and absolutes also contributed to official *policy* which, as Mulhern observes, ‘sponsored a vision of classlessness - through equality of opportunity - but, precisely in doing so, instated the working class as a real cultural presence and topic’.³¹

Alongside the historians’ recovery of ordinary experience from ‘the enormous condescension of posterity’, a broad range of sociological investigation and pedagogical theory was prompted by the category of ‘working-class culture’.³² Roger Bromley describes ‘a profound engagement with traditions, class, work, and leisure gradually brought in from the margins by hundreds of mostly unknown, but

²⁸ Stefan Collini, English Pasts: Essays in History and Culture, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 1999, p. 226

²⁹ See Sinfield, Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain, p. 277 ff (My italics).

³⁰ Hewison, Culture and Consensus, p. 99. More recently, Simon Schama has written of how his generation were inspired by historians like Thompson, Asa Briggs and Christopher Hill, and the kind of socialist/labour history that offered a corrective to the dominant ‘Whiggish’ and ‘Churchillian’ versions. His *new* popular story is predicated on the observation that ‘both authorized versions of the British past ... have fallen steeply out of favour’. See Simon Schama, A History of Britain: At the Edge of the World? 3000BC-AD1603, BBC Worldwide, London, 2000 (this popular history was reprinted several times in its year of publication), pp. 13-15.

³¹ Mulhern, ‘A Welfare Culture?’, p. 28.

³² E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1979 (first

intrepid, trespassers on the “intellectual property” of an educational elite’.³³ The desire to understand working-class culture, to map and - in the face of variety of perceived challenges - maintain its integrity, informed an enormous body and diversity of intellectual work, cultural theory and grassroots *production*.

The burgeoning historiography of the New Left offers little sense of the extent, nature or nuances of this work outside of its overly rehearsed parameters. A fuller account would perhaps address the central issue of working-class culture as the progenitor of a variety of *practices* beyond the theoretical debate of academics and intellectuals. Earlier work with wider scope such as Stuart Laing’s Representation of Working-Class Life (1986) and Sinfield’s discussion of ‘left-culturalism’ nonetheless provide only partial insights. Consciously eschewing any organising principle, Laing is concerned with the lineaments of a proliferation of texts that dealt with ‘ordinary’ experience. He announces his ‘deliberate intention to avoid that kind of generalising “cultural history” in which the institutional determinations and formal characteristics of different cultural practices are dissolved as a consequence of the pressure to seek thematic similarities’.³⁴ This is, in part, understandable given the disparate nature of the work he deals with. There was certainly no ‘movement’ behind kitchen-sink drama - those plays, novels, and later, films that dealt with the changing experience of working-class life. That said, he implies that ultimately a unifying principle is sadly absent, for ‘many of the texts (written and visual) discussed in the book ... seem ... open to description as lacking

published 1963), p. 13.

³³ Roger Bromley, ‘Introduction to British Section’ in Jessica Munns and Gita Rajan (eds), A Cultural Studies Reader: History, Theory, Practice, Longman, London and New York, 1995, p. 150.

³⁴ Stuart Laing, Representations of Working-Class Life: 1957-1964, Macmillan, Houndmills,

in any political analysis'.³⁵ Exactly what a political analysis might, or *should* look like is a question worth retaining.

Sinfield has a more explicit agenda, offering a pessimistic evaluation of the cultural politics of the post-war settlement, 'the flaws in its conception, and how it went awry'.³⁶ The flaws in *his* history are apparent in a consideration of Arnold Wesker's Centre 42 project, which I document more thoroughly in Chapter Five. This passing show of drama, jazz, folk and poetry is described as a combination of 'relatively accessible instances of high culture together with bits of current student subculture and uncertain gestures towards the creativity of working people'.³⁷ Here is evidence of a left *sub*-culture, ultimately defining itself *against* working-class culture, which was something to be rejected by the upwardly mobile for its passivity, lack of cohesiveness and thrall to the distractions of mass culture and consumerism. I would argue that the relationship was more complex than this. Certainly, 'left-culturalism' *was* paternalistic and valued high/good culture, which could be opposed to an Americanised 'slaughterhouse' culture, the music of Tin-Pan Alley, or what Hoggart labelled the 'candy-floss world'. But what constituted *good* culture also had something to do with an idealised conception of the autonomous, active and authentic components of working-class life - moral, political and *definitely* creative. It is a misrepresentation to imagine that a cultural politics meant a job 'of reading, not of writing'.³⁸ As Williams writes in Culture is Ordinary:

Basingstoke, 1986, p. 1.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

³⁶ Sinfield, Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain, p. 1.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

³⁸ This is Williams' comment on the approach of F.R. Leavis (*q.v.*). 'Leavis's approach ... called upon one to do a certain job (incidentally of reading, not of writing)'. Williams, 'Culture and Revolution: A Comment', p. 27.

We use the word culture in these two senses: to mean a whole way of life - the common meanings; to mean the arts and learning - the special processes of discovery and creative effort. Some writers reserve the word for one or other of these senses; I insist on both, and on the significance of their conjunction.³⁹

It is in this context then that we can begin to think of an aesthetics, defined here as 'A concept inherited from idealist philosophy, referring to *principles* of taste, especially good taste, and hence of beauty'.⁴⁰ This is a concept whose rise can be traced through the late nineteenth century, in its associations with bourgeois refinement as evinced through the production and consumption of 'high culture'.⁴¹ This relationship has presented particular problems for Marxists who have often sought to privilege the realm of the aesthetic in decidedly *unmaterialist* ways. For instance, art is afforded an autonomy and transcendent quality which, by its nature, throws the warped reality of the social into stark relief while giving one a glimpse or feeling of Utopia.⁴² Within the same tradition however, this very sensibility is itself subject to deconstruction: understood as an ideological discourse, reifying sectional interests as necessary, the aesthetic becomes a site for cynical attack.⁴³

³⁹ Raymond Williams, 'Culture is Ordinary' in N. MacKenzie (ed.), Conviction, MacKibbin and Kee, London, 1958, p. 76.

⁴⁰ Tim O'Sullivan, John Hartley, Danny Saunders, Martin Montgomery and John Fiske, Key Concepts in Communication and Cultural Studies, Routledge, London and New York, 1994, p. 6 (My italics).

⁴¹ See Raymond Williams, Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society, Fontana/Croom Helm, Glasgow, 1976, pp. 27-8.

⁴² See, for example, Berel Lang and Forrest Williams (eds), Marxism and Art: Writings in Aesthetics and Criticism, McKay, New York, 1972.

⁴³ As discussed in Terry Eagleton, The Ideology of the Aesthetic, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1991, p. 366 ff.

Nonetheless an abiding question for a radical cultural politics has been ‘can there be a materialist, “marxist” or feminist aesthetics, and how would it differ from what exists already?’⁴⁴ This question ignores the place of a *working-class* aesthetics and its discovery or generation, which is surely somewhere at the root of this lineage and has a specific relationship with Marxist thought. We can list an older desire for *Proletarian* literature, as well as more recent projects concerned with *Oral* culture, *Folk* culture, *Popular Culture*, the *Worker-Writers* movement, *Community* theatre but also *People’s History* and *History from below*. These all have some relationship with this aesthetic question. The variety of such cultural practices demand a more nuanced response than Sinfield’s comment that ‘we now know, people’s art did not take over in 1945, and literary intellectuals were not incorporated into a workers’ state’.⁴⁵ These projects were all predicated upon the desire to respect and give voice to what had been previously thought of, if thought of at all, or even *heard*, as profanity or as the words of ‘speakers whose mouths could utter nothing but the rough sounds Bar-Bar’.⁴⁶

What is missing from our historical accounts then, is any attention to practices and projects actively guided by notions of creativity and the belief that working-class people could partake of and *participate* in the public and cultural spheres. Sinfield’s disdain and the timidity of our definition of an alternative aesthetics is no doubt directed at a vulgar prescriptive cultural theory usually associated with the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) which nonetheless

⁴⁴ O’Sullivan et al, *Key Concepts in Communication and Cultural Studies*, p. 7.

⁴⁵ Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain*, p. 50.

⁴⁶ Tony Crowley, *The Politics of Discourse: The Standard Language Question in British Cultural Debates*, Macmillan, Houndmills, Basingstoke, 1989, p. 217. More recently see his *Language in*

needs appraisal. At first glance, a recent collection of studies of the cultural life of the Party offers a useful exploration of its importance, claiming that 'The arts were one of the ways in which communist ideas entered the mainstream of British life and through which the Party was able to identify itself as the defender of native, popular traditions and as the bearer of the new and, therefore, of the future'.⁴⁷ Tellingly, it does not go 'much beyond 1956', that watershed year of disillusionment, preferring instead to explore the certainties of the Party's heyday.⁴⁸ It delineates 'a dynamism and vision that helped to lay the foundations for a new radical culture, a progressive avant-garde in which the struggle was always to produce a culture for and of the people'.⁴⁹

Andy Croft's introductory remarks are concerned with the recuperation of this cultural work from the dogmatic reputation of the Party, suggesting that it 'was not always as reductive or as grim as its pronouncements on the subject'.⁵⁰ He oversees some interesting case studies of particular authors (James Barke, Sylvia Townsend Warner) and artists (Jameses Boswell, Fitton and Holland), as well as activities in publishing, music, theatre and public events such as the people's pageants of the 1930s. However, this is all done in rather affectionate, celebratory manner. What is absent is any real framework with which to understand the common impulse that bound these projects together, and that distanced them from the Party

History: Theories and Texts, Routledge, London and New York, 1996, pp. 147-88.

⁴⁷ 'Introduction' in Andy Croft (ed.), A Weapon in the Struggle: The Cultural History of the Communist Party of Great Britain, Pluto Press, London, Sterling, Virginia, 1998, p. 4.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 3. As a result Croft suggests that his collection suffers from many obvious omissions. These include discussion of the radio work of Charles Parker, the role of the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA), the National Association for the Teaching of English (NATE) and the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA). All are mentioned in subsequent chapters although not as part of a specific contribution to the history of the CPGB.

⁴⁹ Ibid., back cover.

line in support of art born of a 'class which is struggling to create a new social order ... free from the anarchist individualism of the bourgeoisie in its period of decay'.⁵¹ In fact, the idea of culture, resting upon the implicit binary of bourgeois vs. working class ('people', 'progressive', 'radical', 'vernacular' - although rarely 'proletarian') remains unscrutinised. I would add that despite a curious embarrassment about the cruder descriptions of this bifurcation it is one that continued to inform a variety of radical thinking, ossifying during the late 1960s in the call to 'Combat Bourgeois Ideas'.⁵² Any history of these cultural ideas surely needs an account of the construction 'bourgeois' and its deployment.

More helpful is Tom Steele, who has extended the narrative of the New Left. He has documented the pre-history of cultural studies and the pedagogical imperatives of the Workers Educational Authority (WEA), which contributed so much to the formation of the work and ideas of Williams, Hoggart and Thompson. He suggests that between the wars culture as term did not enjoy anything like the currency and complexity that it later had as a result of their work. Any consideration of the idea was still very much confined to Matthew Arnold's sense of 'the best that has been thought and said': 'Certainly "working-class culture" and "popular culture" were not terms in widespread use'.⁵³ Within the WEA there were many committed to a utilitarian educational policy, diffusing knowledge for the advancement of working-class political consciousness. It was in this context that a concept of

⁵⁰ Croft, *A Weapon in the Struggle*, p. 1.

⁵¹ Lenin, quoted in Hanna Behrend, 'An Intellectual Irrelevance? Marxist Literary Criticism in the 1930s', in *Ibid*, p. 110.

⁵² Cover banner, *New Left Review*, No 50, July-August 1968.

⁵³ Steele, *The Emergence of Cultural Studies*, p. 86.

working-class culture as a relationship between 'a whole way of life' and a particular mode of production and expression was developed.

If culture in its traditional sense had served to express and underwrite sectional interests then could it not be forged to democratic ends? In an article of 1938, published in the organisation's journal Highway, tutor Dryden Brook opined that the purpose of the WEA was 'the creation of a type of adult education and popular culture that will be a tool in the hands of the working class in forging a new social order'.⁵⁴ In the same vein, E.P.Thompson later validated a variety of approaches to cultural issues. He urged the WEA to campaign for extended cultural facilities, suggesting that it should turn from mere study to engage with living cultural activities. As Steele writes, the suggestion was that 'the Shakespeare class, for example, should not turn up its nose at the local amateur dramatic production but get stuck in and dirty its hands with *popular* culture'.⁵⁵

A key issue in the way in which culture has been thought about is outlined by aesthetic theorist Joaquin Zuniga. He has argued that the attention of aestheticians has tended to concentrate upon reception rather than production and that 'the focus is commonly on aesthetic experience (with an emphasis on perception), appreciation, the critic's role therein and the like'.⁵⁶ This distinction is important here, and as Zuniga notes, even in Marxist work, (Herbert Marcuse's The Aesthetic Dimension [1979] for instance), 'The common man, the non-artist, i.e., presumably

⁵⁴ Quoted in Steele, The Emergence of Cultural Studies, p. 88.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 169.

⁵⁶ Joaquin Zuniga, 'An Everyday Aesthetic Impulse: Dewey Revisited', British Journal of Aesthetics, Vol.29, No.1, Winter 1989, p. 40.

most of humankind, is forgotten as an aesthetic producer'.⁵⁷ In contrast, it seems to me that this is *the* singular aspect of the wider tradition under scrutiny - within the New Left or in the approaches of the nascent disciplines of social history or cultural studies. This is the object of understanding and validation of 'a whole way of life' for its creative aspects, for the way in which meanings are produced and directed by people as conscious historical and social agents. Yet as Eagleton observes, this definition of culture is one which has involved 'a transference to society of the values linked with culture as art. Culture as a way of life is an aestheticized version of society, finding in it the unity, sensuous immediacy and freedom from conflict which we associate with the aesthetic artefact'.⁵⁸ This observation is key to a precise understanding of my approach. The term which supposedly designates versions of the social is in fact 'a normative way of imagining that society', consequently it can be investigated and deconstructed for the values it brings to this imagination. Furthermore, by extending the terms of the aesthetic, and wondering what concepts of taste or beauty might mean in such a context, it is possible to address some of the *a priori principles* that have informed approaches to the theorisation of working-class culture and its expression.⁵⁹

Initially, we can understand what is at issue here with a consideration of the approach of a familiar conservative position: that of the cultural critic F.R. Leavis and his followers. As Georgina Boyes has shown, while Leavis followed in the footsteps of Matthew Arnold, his social concerns and cultural criticism owed a debt

⁵⁷ Zuniga, 'An Everyday Aesthetic Impulse: Dewey Revisited', p. 42.

⁵⁸ Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture*, p. 25. For the ultimate expression of this in the idea of 'general symbolic creativity' and 'grounded aesthetics' (e.g. as expressed in drinking and fighting) see Paul Willis, *Common Culture: Symbolic Work at Play in the Everyday Cultures of the Young*, Open

to ideas developed within the British folk movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.⁶⁰ These ideas involved an idealisation of an authentic, organic and communally produced culture believed to have passed with a pre-industrial 'Merrie England'. This was counterpoised with the culture, or *absence* of culture, of the dislocated, brutalised, anarchic urban proletariat. More often than not, these people needed to be reinvented or reconciled with their *authentic* inheritance. This is the sense that underwrites Leavisite validations of community and 'Life', those sensibilities preserved in the 'great tradition' of novels, poetry and drama and conveyed in their proper appreciation. The inculcation of this appreciation formed the basis of a pedagogical imperative: 'For we are committed to more consciousness; that way, if any, lies salvation. We cannot, as we might in a healthy state of culture, leave the citizen to be formed unconsciously by his environment; if anything like a worthy idea of satisfactory living is to be saved, he must be trained to discriminate and resist'.⁶¹

The Leavisite assessment of modernity - the age of the machine - was based upon a belief that, alongside its many advantages, it had involved 'standardization and levelling-down outside the realm of mere material goods'.⁶² The remedy was that whatever the shape of the social, at a cultural level it could be refashioned along more durable and idealised lines. Based upon a yearning for the pastoral, this kind of thinking has been subject to much criticism. Where it surfaces in the work of the

University Press, Milton Keynes, 1990.

⁵⁹ Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture*, p. 25.

⁶⁰ Georgina Boyes, *The Imagined Village: Culture, Ideology and the English Folk Revival*, Manchester University Press, Manchester and New York, 1993.

⁶¹ F.R. Leavis and Denys Thompson, *Culture and Environment: The Training of Critical Awareness*, Chatto and Windus, London, 1959 (first published 1933), p. 5.

⁶² *Ibid*, p. 3.

New Left - in Hoggart's Uses of Literacy, for instance - it has been critiqued for its political inadequacies. As I discuss in Chapter Three, this criticism proves most revealing when directed by Marxists for the priorities and ideals *they* bring to the social and cultural. And yet, as both Boyes and Steele (amongst others) demonstrate, British Marxist cultural theory itself shares similar roots with Leavisism and both traditions evince similar discontents and an idealist impulse to reshape the social.

Joyce has commented that in the field of social history it is Marxism that forms the basic repertoire of concepts, and whatever its variety may be, it 'provided its common sense in its heyday, from the 1960s to the 1980s, when the British Marxist historians were dominant'.⁶³ And, as Dennis Dworkin has shown, this 'common sense' has informed virtually all of the significant work in cultural studies and social theory of the same period. As I have mentioned, those of conservative and radical bent have begun to contest these frameworks as well as some of the political ideas associated with them, tending towards broad caricature. Eagleton, for instance, lampoons the 'infantile disorder known as ultra-leftism' which 'negates the present in the name of some inconceivably alternative future'.⁶⁴ Celebrating the changes of the 1960s Arthur Marwick takes issue with those of the right, who see it as the seed-bed of contemporary decline - moral, social, economic - but also those of the left who see it as a decade of lost opportunity. The apparent myopia of the latter is resultant of the *Great Marxisant Fallacy*, 'the belief that the society we inhabit is the bad bourgeois society, but that, fortunately, this society is in a state of crisis, so that

⁶³ Joyce, Class, p. 8. Joanna Bourke has described the concern with working-class consciousness, for instance, as 'the intellectual fascination of British social history'. See, Joanna Bourke, Working-Class Cultures in Britain 1890-1960: Gender, Class and Ethnicity, Routledge, London, 1994, p. 1.

⁶⁴ Eagleton, The Idea of Culture, p. 22.

the good society which lies just around the corner can be easily attained if only we work systematically to destroy the language, the values, the culture, the ideology of bourgeois society'.⁶⁵

Such views can be situated within the long assessment of the deficiencies in components of 'the political imaginary of the Left', what Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe describe as its 'essentialist apriorism'.⁶⁶ Underwriting this is a *classism*, that is, 'the idea that the working class represents the privileged agent in which the fundamental impulse of social change resides'.⁶⁷ This is the site of what they describe as socialism's 'Jacobin imaginary'. They suggest that this idea, now in crisis, has its basis in a teleological faith whose tenets include: the ontological certainty of the working class; the role of the Revolution, with a capital 'r', as well as a will and unitary collective consciousness that will 'render pointless the moment of politics'.⁶⁸

From a different perspective Patrick Wright describes various conjunctions of past and present and their contemporary political uses. Considering the problematic relationship the traditional British labour movement has had with the

⁶⁵ Arthur Marwick, The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c.1958-c.1974, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 1998, p. 10. This is a rather unbalanced and willfully misrepresentative account. Examples he gives here are those of Bart Moore-Gilbert and John Seed (eds), Cultural Revolution? The Challenge of the Arts in the 1960s (1992), and various 'Classic Marxist accounts' such as work originating in the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS): Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (eds), Resistance Through Rituals (1976) and Dick Hebdige's Subcultures: the Meaning of Style (1979), (n.10, p. 808). Marwick later suggests that the British 'New Left', and many of the CCCS - who characterised its Gramscian, 'culturalist' turn - was a grouping of 'non-dogmatic Marxists' (p. 13).

⁶⁶ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985), 'Radical Democracy: Alternative for a New Left' in Charles Lemert (ed.), Social Theory: The Multicultural and Classic Readings, Westview Press, Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford, 1993, p. 541.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 542.

⁶⁸ Quoted in Wai Chee Dimock and Michael T. Gilmore, 'Introduction' in (eds), Wai Chee Dimock and Michael T. Gilmore, Rethinking Class: Literary Studies and Social Formations, Columbia University Press, New York, 1994, p. 5.

national past he identifies its own reliance upon *the marching proletariat alignment*.⁶⁹ Also called the 'Forward March of Labour', this narrative views historical development as an indefatigable struggle 'through which the working class "wins" the present'.⁷⁰ It is this that has aided the understanding, organisation, and use of the past within this movement. Thinking of the gains and transformations of the post-war years, the unravelling of empirical support for this traditional formation, he identifies 'a tendency to fall back onto the historical style - the gestures and vocabulary - of a time when solidarity and progress did seem intact, a time when the presence of socialism seemed positive and growing, and when the road did indeed seem to stretch out in front of the marchers'.⁷¹

It is not difficult to find affirmation of this position in much post-war academic research. Consider the case of the Communist Party Historians' group and its centrality to the anglicising of Marxism. As Richard Johnson observes, alongside Hoggart and Williams, its influence as a 'matrix for cultural studies' is paradoxical.⁷² For all of its political allegiance and the desire 'to become historians of the present too', the group was less concerned with contemporary culture, or even the twentieth century, instead exploring historical traditions of radicalism and popular struggle. As Steele observes of Thompson's work, popular culture was of interest only as much as it sustained resistance or rebellion. This could counter what Thompson called 'the values of private living ... private fears and neuroses, the self-

⁶⁹ Patrick Wright, *On Living in an Old Country: The National Past in Contemporary Britain*, Verso, London and New York, 1991 (first published 1985), p. 153 ff.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 155-6.

⁷² Richard Johnson, 'What is Cultural Studies Anyway?' in Munns and Rajan, *A Cultural Studies Reader*, p.575. (Originally published as a CCCS stencilled occasional paper, No.74, 1983).

interest and timid individualism fostered by pulp magazines and Hollywood films'.⁷³ *Authentic* culture - as a 'whole way of life' or particular 'processes of discovery and creative effort' - had something to do with 'the great proletarian values revealed in class-solidarity and militancy'.⁷⁴ This was the prompt for a political pedagogy: 'bringing our almost forgotten revolutionary traditions once again before the people'.⁷⁵ A sense of unease about the material gains of the 1950s and 1960s is in evidence here too, representing, perhaps, a fear of a sapping of the true nature of working-class life. A peculiar Puritanism imbues such positions: Jeremy Seabrook in his Working Class Childhood (1982) comments that 'Instead of the children of the working class being subjected to rigorous self-denial for a lifetime in mill or mine they have been offered instead the promise of easy and immediate gratification which, in the end, can sabotage human development and achievement just as effectively as the poverty of the past'.⁷⁶

These insights and the apparent apostasy of a figure like Joyce should not obscure the actual nuances and self-reflexivity within the Marxist tradition. In fact, one of the key characteristics of the British New Left surely, is that it has consistently problematised class as a category and advertised the partisan intent in the methods that it has employed.⁷⁷ Johnson, for example, is sensitive to the close association between ethnographies based on 'sympathetic identification and empiricist or "expressive" models of culture'. He writes that,

⁷³ Steele, The Emergence of Cultural Studies, p. 165.

⁷⁴ E.P. Thompson, 'William Morris and the Moral Issues To-day', Arena. Special Issue: The U.S.A. Threat to British Culture, Vol. 11, No.8. June/July 1951, p. 29.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Jeremy Seabrook, Working Class Childhood, Gollancz, London, 1982, p. 147.

⁷⁷ Beginning perhaps with Stuart Hall, 'A Sense of Classlessness', Universities and Left Review, No.5, Autumn, 1958.

The pressure is to represent lived cultures as authentic ways of life and to uphold them against ridicule or condescension ... A very common way of upholding subordinated cultures has been to stress the bonds between the subjective and objective sides of popular practices. Working-class culture has been seen as the authentic expression of proletarian conditions, perhaps the only expression possible. This relation or identity has sometimes been cemented by “old marxist” assumptions about the proper state of consciousness of the working-class ... The term which most commonly indexes this theoretical framework is “experience”, with its characteristic fusing of objective and subjective aspects.⁷⁸

Thompson’s work is particularly intriguing for the way in which he himself framed and decried the inadequate *a priorism* of others. In the famous and oft-quoted preface to The Making of the English Working Class he takes issue with those who would reify class. In too much of ‘latter day “Marxist” writing’, he suggests, what results is a prescription for working class life, and that ‘Once this is assumed it becomes possible to deduce the class-consciousness which “it” ought to have (but seldom does have) if “it” was properly aware of its own position and real interests’.⁷⁹ Those that he vilified for shoddy thinking of this kind did not benefit from the theoretical radicalism of the late 1960s. In a later reflection he considered the endurance of a certain kind of vulgar Marxism, how it acted in analogous ways to positivist sociological theory: ‘In one common (usually Leninist) form this provides a ready justification for the politics of “substitutions”: i.e., the “vanguard”

⁷⁸ Johnson, ‘What is Cultural Studies Anyway?’, p. 604.

⁷⁹ Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, p. 10.

which knows better than the class itself what its true interests (and consciousness) ought to be. If “it” does not happen to have that consciousness then whatever it has is “false consciousness”.⁸⁰

In arguments like these, Thompson sought to reclaim Marx from the vulgar inadequacy of his followers. Yet if one turns to Marx’s ‘The Holy Family’ (1845) for instance, one finds confirmation of a particular objectification of class and the teleology of the historical relationship and struggle that defines it. Thus ‘The question is not what goal is *envisaged* for the time being by this or that member of the proletariat, or even by the proletariat as a whole. The question is *what is the proletariat* and what course of action will it be forced historically to take in conformity with its own *nature*’.⁸¹ It is difficult not to agree with Joyce who suggests that the adjective ‘class’ has sent its millions on this march through history, ‘complete with “working-class” values, “middle-class” politics, and so on. As a narrative principle it gives these actors their various parts in the resulting stories of past and present’.⁸²

Whether or not Thompson himself was consistent in his perception of the ‘fluency’ of the relationship of class and history is a moot point. Despite the insistence that ‘we cannot predicate any *law*’, his own position was directed by a

⁸⁰ Thompson, quoted in Joyce, *Class*, p. 134 (originally from *Social History*, May 1978). In sociologies from the 1970s there are suggestions along these lines: ‘Many Marxists today argue that whereas the “objective” conditions for a proletarian revolution exist or are relatively advanced, the workers’ “subjective” consciousness of their historical role lags behind. Theories of “false consciousness” ... normally make an appearance here’ (Michael Mann, *Consciousness and Action Among the Western Working Class*, Macmillan, London and Basingstoke, 1973, p. 12.). For a classic example of the idea of ‘false consciousness’ see Georg Lukács, ‘Class Consciousness’ in Terry Eagleton (ed.), *Ideology*, Longman, London and New York, 1991, pp. 35-6. For a discussion of the problems involved in eschewing such positions see Eagleton’s introduction, pp. 16-17.

⁸¹ ‘The Holy Family’; in L.D. Easton and K.H. Guddat (eds), *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society*, Doubleday, New York, 1967, p. 368.

⁸² Joyce, *Class*, p. 11.

positivist sense, that ‘we are not at the end of social evolution ourselves’.⁸³ And that evolution is directed by dialectical principles, informed, as Joyce suggests, by the familiar cause and effect framework of historical materialism. Even if Thompson’s practice did not always match his theory, at base economic relations produced ‘experience’ and thus ‘consciousness’: historical change is effected through struggle, which is always *class* struggle. Alongside this feature, a further problem is highlighted by Michael Savage in his survey of developments in Marxist historiography. Sensitive to the limits and continued virtues of aspects of the Marxist approach, he highlights a ‘weak historicism’ in Thompson’s work. He suggests that despite Thompson’s insistence on the fluidity of class and the complexity of its ‘making’, ‘there is a tendency to assume that once a class is “made”, its basic character is given’.⁸⁴

These then are the component parts of an ‘allegedly discredited marxist analytical “realism”’.⁸⁵ Fundamental categories provided by this approach have proven to be increasingly difficult to maintain.⁸⁶ However, speaking of that which Joyce labels the ‘liberal-left consensus of social history’, Geoff Eley and Keith Nield argue that it must be given its due.⁸⁷ The projects that I outline in subsequent chapters here have something to do with this consensus and I give texture to the

⁸³ Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, p. 10-13.

⁸⁴ Michael Savage, ‘Space, Networks and Class Formation’, in Neville Kirk (ed.), Social Class and Marxism: Defence and Challenges, Scolar Press, London, 1996, p. 62.

⁸⁵ Geoff Eley and Keith Nield, ‘Starting Over: the Present, the Post-modern and the Moment of Social History’, Social History, Vol.20, No.3, October 1995, p. 359.

⁸⁶ See Joyce’s suggestive essay ‘The People’s English: Language and Class in England c. 1840-1920’ in Peter Burke and Roy Porter (eds), Language, Self, and Society: A Social History of Language, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1991. Here he takes issue with accounts of working-class culture (in the form of dialect literature) that deal in a ‘fantasy world inhabited by “class traitors”, “labour aristocrats”, and other examples of “false consciousness”’. (p. 166).

⁸⁷ Eley and Nield, ‘Starting Over’, p. 359.

milieu that enabled the work it informed. There is an implicit acknowledgement of the considerable achievement involved in what is after all a relatively recent production of a discourse of 'working-class culture'. But I aim to do more than this by attending to the fact that a prodigious amount of work has been predicated upon *prior* notions of what an adequate working-class culture, consciousness, experience or expression might be. Consequently, the resultant deficiencies and exclusions of the histories, sociologies and practices prompted by (and prompting) this idea cannot be ignored. Some of these deficiencies are outlined by Henri Lefebvre who, in writing of the related idea of the 'everyday', suggests that philosophy since Plato and Aristotle has put itself above the *quotidienne*, excluding it from consideration. Repeated throughout the Western tradition this bias was at last undermined by Marx, although he himself 'concentrated on labor, on work, on productive activity, an emphasis followed by many Marxists since then. But workers do not only have a life in the workplace, they have a social life, family life, political life; they have experiences outside the domain of labor'.⁸⁸ As Feminism has continued to demonstrate, for instance, there are those who labour and who have experiences and consciousness outside of this paradigm, unaccounted for and not necessarily amenable to its categories, politics and priorities.

Joan Scott has indicated that the 'evidence of experience' is essentialised in historical methodology as being self-evident. Precluding analysis of the 'ideological system' she writes, 'instead it reproduces its terms'.⁸⁹ She describes Thompson's use

⁸⁸ Henri Lefebvre, 'Toward a Leftist Cultural Politics: Remarks Occasioned by the Centenary of Marx's Death' (translated by David Reifman) in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds), Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture, Macmillan, Houndmills, Basingstoke, 1988, p. 78.

⁸⁹ Joan Scott, 'Experience' in Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott, Feminists Theorize the Political,

of experience in Making of the English Working Class as something shaped by relations of production, beginning a process that culminates in a common social consciousness which is that of class. The conclusion is thus that 'when class becomes an overriding identity, other subject positions are subsumed by it, those of gender ... race, ethnicity, and sexuality'.⁹⁰ Furthermore, Steedman underlines the consequences of this kind of totalising analysis. She critiques the manner in which a psychological simplicity has been ascribed to working class mental life, that the people 'have come to be seen, within the field of cultural criticism, as bearing the elemental simplicity of class-consciousness and little more'.⁹¹ Class-consciousness can be understood as 'a possible set of reactions people might have to discovering the implications of the position they occupy within the realm of production'.⁹² She suggests that forms of working-class autobiography and people's history were developed in order to allow individual and collective expression of 'thoughts, feelings and desires about class societies and the effects of class structures on individuals and communities'.⁹³ These projects have had little space for psychology and any understanding of the development of class-consciousness, its learned status, or as a *prior* framework for writing and structuring such histories. Conceived as politically enabling, the paradox is that for some, this idea has proven to be somewhat self-defeating in the limitations and denials it has placed before the possibilities of working-class life. As Gayatri Spivak has famously asked, 'Can the subaltern speak?', qualifying her question with the suggestion that: 'We should ...

Routledge, New York and London, 1992, p. 25.

⁹⁰ Scott, 'Experience', p. 30.

⁹¹ Steedman, Landscape For a Good Woman, p.13.

⁹² Ibid, (via Lukács and Eric Hobsbawm).

welcome all the information retrieval in these silenced areas that is taking place in anthropology, political science, history and sociology. Yet the assumption and construction of a consciousness or subject sustains such work and will, in the long run, cohere with the work of imperialist subject-constitution, mingling epistemic violence with the advancement of learning and civilization'.⁹⁴

A range of work of varying sophistication and achievement has been produced that is attentive to these observations and the broader challenges of post-structuralism. One possible response has been the virtual abandonment of class as an explanatory tool. Thus, in one study of post-war Britain, surveys of attitudes and changes in the family, poverty, consumption and so on, are advanced in place of 'vague generalisations about "class" or "capitalism" or "hegemony" or whatever', by virtue of the fact that British society is simply 'diverse and ever-changing – and incapable of being summed up in any simple formula'.⁹⁵ Yet, Marxist or otherwise, others have attempted to retain class and expand upon this category in ways that are 'more fully engaged with other forms of identity such as gender, race, people and nation, than was the case during the 1960s and early 1970s'.⁹⁶ For instance, Joanna Bourke's focus on working-class cultures attends to 'the individual stripped of ... institutional affiliations'.⁹⁷ Stepping outside the history of trade unions, workingmen's clubs and political parties she locates her study about other sites such

⁹³ Steedman, *Landscape For a Good Woman*, p. 13.

⁹⁴ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in Nelson and Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, pp. 294-5.

⁹⁵ James Obelkevich and Peter Catterall, 'Introduction: Understanding British Society' in James Obelkevich and Peter Catterall (eds), *Understanding Post-War British Society*, Routledge, London, 1994, p. 1.

⁹⁶ Neville Kirk, 'Editor's Introduction' in Neville Kirk (ed.), *Social Class and Marxism: Defence and Challenges*, Scholar Press, 1996, p. 5.

⁹⁷ Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures in Britain*, p. 1.

as ‘the body, the home, the marketplace, the locality, and the imagined “nation”’. Bourke explores the consciousness of class as one component in the formation of identity, seeking to understand the manner in which ‘individuals constructed and reconstructed their states of desire’.⁹⁸

Also receptive to recent debates are scholars like Ross McKibbin and David Cannadine who nonetheless have continued to insist that class has been the central factor in how people have understood themselves, their place in the social and cultural sphere, and how those realms have been ordered. The lived reality of class is the basis for Cannadine’s question of ‘how has class actually existed?’ He suggests a move away from constraints of Marxist hermeneutics to examine the mutability of this category and the interests that it has served, that ‘rather than employ class to explain history, it now seems that we should employ history to explain class’.⁹⁹ Yet as I have suggested, there has been an abiding current in the Marxist tradition that has been sensitive to the problems presented by its fundamental concerns and elisions. As Savage has indicated, class when enlisted by Marxists has appeared to be ‘over-reductionist, unable to handle the complexity of people’s ways of thinking and acting in the past’.¹⁰⁰ Seeking to defend its use, he seeks to evaluate whether it has any utility as a concept for understanding social change. He outlines the way in which attention to the spatial dimensions of class formation might aid in a better

⁹⁸ Bourke, Working-Class Cultures in Britain, p. 1. In this vein, see also Lucy Noakes, War and the British: Gender and National Identity, 1939-1990, I.B. Taurus, London, 1998 and most recently Claire A. Culleton, Working-Class Culture, Women, and Britain, 1914-1921, Palgrave, London, 2000.

⁹⁹ David Cannadine, Class in Britain, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1998, p. 17. See also Ross McKibbin, Classes and Cultures: England, 1918-1950, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1998 which offers an interesting point of comparison with his earlier The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain, 1880-1950, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1990. This collects a variety of essays written in the 1970s and mid 1980s.

understanding of the complex, diverse and fluid character of how class is formed or made, of the tensions between structure and agency. Thus, understanding the social networks of different groups, in different places and different times allows a move ‘beyond ideas of classes being “made” in some sort of definitive way’.¹⁰¹

This last statement is intended to warn against the deficiencies of how class has been conceived and as such it offers a connection to what I am attempting in this thesis. Thus, it is important to stress what is different here and the originality of this project. This is not, as such, an addition or rewriting of existing histories of working-class life in the period of 1939-1979. Nor is this an exploration of Marxist historiography or an attempt to solve general problems of method, although my approach offers useful insights into these areas. Instead, my focus is upon how the working classes were *imagined* within a range of cultural theory (including of course, Thompsonian history as one of those theories). Thus my concern is not so much social histories of the period, but the way in which this period of history is figured within cultural studies and a range of cultural theories and attempts to confirm these theories in the cultivation of particular practices.

Pace Bourke, the ‘states of desire’ of the working classes were indeed an object of interest, but here it would be more appropriate to speak of the working class, or idealised versions of them, their lives, culture and its expression, as an *object* of desire. For me, it is the nature of the desire and, to a degree, the repulsion that was brought to bear upon ideas of working-class culture and expression that is important. Sympathetic and unsympathetic prejudices – social, political, sexual,

¹⁰⁰ Savage, ‘Space, Networks and Class Formations’, p. 58.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, p. 80.

historical, cultural, geographical – all of these were factors bearing upon the way in which working-class life was understood and the possibilities of how it could be represented but most importantly how it might represent *itself*.

My first chapter offers first a broad introduction to historical ‘discoveries’ of the working-class and how they have been imagined in relation to notions of culture and expression. In the first part the work employed in forming my narrative itself gives some texture to the range of scholarship that has attended to working-class life in the last fifty years. This is used to underline the qualitative distinction between the pre and post-war periods, a transition signalled in the work of the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA). This forerunner of the Arts Council is a useful site for thinking about the cultural questions qualified by the ‘People’s War’ and the anticipation of the egalitarian world that could be forged in victory. Original research for this chapter was conducted in the library of the Arts Council itself and its archive, which is now held in the Victoria and Albert Museum.

The study of the Folk Revival in Chapter Two provides a paradigm for thinking of the cultural politics and practices of this era. Figures such as Ewan MacColl and A.L.Lloyd, communists whose ideas were formed in the 1930s, sought to demonstrate the continuous tradition of a radical culture. In this instance I utilise a myriad of sources, the statements and articles generated by folk ‘authorities’ but in particular what we might call the ‘little magazines’. Mimeographed, or more professional and expensive in execution and presentation, these magazines were produced by those clubs and enthusiasts of the revival. Indicating its debates they convey the intricate network that gave it something of an ‘organic’ character but also

Parker's records have been crucial to my examination of the Centre 42 project in Chapter Five. Here, the diversity of its approaches to culture underlines the priority of this very issue in this period. The lineage of those involved in its work - MacColl, Lloyd and Parker played a part - proves revealing to any framing some of the debates within it and the visions of the working class that it proceeded with. Highly ambitious and original in conception I want to consider how this event prefigures developments in areas as diverse as radical theatre and the worker-writers movement of the 1970s.

The penultimate chapter deals with the field of education and the progressive ideal that produced the projects of creative writing and Oracy. These were pedagogies designed to understand and articulate the values and experiences that the majority brought to the classroom. In this instance a tradition of Leavisism met with a more radical politics and indeed with many of the initiatives outlined in the other case studies in a variety of experiments and exchanges. In the light of the distractions that surrounded them, the aim was to put before all children a particular cultural legacy in order to generate a self-awareness, critical perspective and *authenticity*. The range of this work and its endorsement as official policy gives a sense of the achievement and range of work from the post-war era that sought to apprehend the nature and possibilities of working-class life, and to give it valid expression. By the same degree this investigation involves an encounter with what seems to be the very 'pastness' of this impulse.

It will be apparent already that much of my material has been drawn from Birmingham sources. Originally, I had intended to produce a coherent locally based

study, one that would have been attentive to the spatial dimensions of class formation and identity outlined by Savage. However, any geographical specificity seems less important here than general associations of the urban and industrial with the working class and the relationship of these with how they were imagined, idealised and aestheticised.

The final chapter is based upon research conducted mainly in the education libraries of the University of Warwick and the School of Education at the University of Birmingham. It is derived from surveys of a wealth of policy documents and educational directives authorised by the Education Act of 1944 – perhaps *the* most important event in the formation of the *mentalités* of Welfare State Britain. I have consulted curriculum schedules and examination papers, pedagogical publications and memoirs concerned with class. In total these documents and the ideas they represent have been exhausted, abandoned or supplanted by other categories, most notably that of ‘multi-culturalism’, as the demands of deprivation and cultural difference have apparently shifted in recent decades. Considering this material and the space to which it has been consigned, ready for archiving or disposal, is to be presented as a historian with a material event analogous to developments in contemporary historiography, and indeed, in many other fields besides. It is suggestive that historians like Joyce now seem ready to abandon categories that have proven to be both profitable articles of faith, and conceptual tools that have directed social policies and attitudes. How and why ideas of class have been used, the way in which they have been inflected, understood and cultivated, these are the core issues that inform this thesis.

The studies that follow, and the way in which the various projects and ideas I describe informed each other, offer a highly textured account of how class was thought of and acted upon in post-war Britain. As I have argued above, these provide insights into areas and debates that are dealt with in repetitive and narrow fashion, expanding and historicising the parameters of existing narratives. It is clear, I hope, that I subscribe to the belief that class is a pertinent category to the understanding of the past and that something of fundamental material benefit was achieved with the post-war settlement. This thesis contributes to a more nuanced appraisal of the ways in which this achievement affected the conception of the commonweal, how the majority was imagined, and the role they might inhabit and play in it.

Chapter One.

Utopian Habits? Ideas of Class and Culture, c. 1830-1945.

If you get into the habit of thinking that a bourgeois society produces, in a simple and direct way, a bourgeois culture, then you are likely to think that a socialist society will produce, also simply and directly, a socialist culture, and you may think it incumbent on you to say what it will be like. As a matter of fact, most of the speculation about the “socialist culture” of the future has been no more than a Utopian habit; one cannot take it very seriously.¹

Whether or not it obtains in historical epistemology any longer, class has proven to be an enduring category. Organising, maintaining and challenging conceptualisations of difference, it is intimately bound up in the production and negotiation of notions of the social, political, national, historical and indeed, the human. In this chapter I want to outline some of the ways in which class and difference have been explored, articulated, and reified through the prism of culture, in the intractable relationship of its anthropological and aesthetic senses. While acknowledging the wealth of work documenting the empirical, lived experience of class in Britain, I shall illustrate something of the history of how the working class has been situated as both object and subject of culture, as idea and *ideal*.²

¹ Raymond Williams, Culture and Society: 1780-1950, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1961 (first published 1958), p. 273.

² E.g.: Joanna Bourke, Working-Class Cultures in Britain 1890-1960 : Gender, Class, and Ethnicity, Routledge, London, 1994; Ross McKibbin, Classes and Cultures: England, 1918-1950, Oxford

In my introduction I indicated that little attention has been paid to the mapping of instances or ideas about working-class cultural aesthetic production and expression. While this is undoubtedly the case for activities from the post-war era, there is a variety of valuable material that explores the same territory in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Enlisted here, this work itself also needs to be thought of as framing the context already outlined; but it is also framed *by* that self-reflexive commentary that has begun to question the categories and assumptions upon which it has been based. Thus, this work offers insights into the past projects it maps and by implication the era in which the research was itself authorised, produced and published.³

The aim here is to draw a distinction between attitudes towards class and culture before and after the Second World War and my main focus in this chapter is on the foundation and ethos of the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA). An organisation dedicated to providing cultural experiences for the general population, and also inviting participation in productive and creative activities, CEMA's significance lies in its role in underwriting the notion that 'This was a people's war'.⁴ While there has been some dispute about this construction, the consensus view of social-democratic ideas and their ultimate impact upon the lineaments of British society, CEMA is evidence of the opportunities that were offered in this period.⁵ In intent and practice it signals how some of the structuring

University Press, Oxford, 1998 and most recently Claire A. Culleton, Working-Class Culture, Women, and Britain, 1914-1921, Palgrave, London, 2000.

³ It is worth noting the amount of secondary material used hereafter that is produced by a 'left-leaning' publishing house like Lawrence and Wishart.

⁴ A.J.P Taylor, English History, 1914-45, Oxford University Press, London, 1965, p. 600.

⁵ For a discussion see Steven Fielding, Peter Thompson and Nick Tiratsoo, "England arise!": The Labour Party and Popular Politics in 1940s Britain, Manchester University Press, Manchester and

assumptions of the social hierarchy were tested, challenged, where such challenges originated and what changes occurred. Of central importance here is the history and changing perspectives on the conscripts of this war: the 'people' themselves.

i.

Raphael Samuel suggests that the ambiguous term 'ordinary people' was a coinage of the 1930s, one that replaced, or sat alongside, 'everyman' and 'the common people'.⁶ These can be added to a rich lexicon that might also include 'the folk' and Matthew Arnold's 'populace'. Then there is 'the proletariat', as enlisted by Karl Marx in the Communist Manifesto (1848) 'largely for dramatic effect'.⁷ Added to these is the ubiquitous 'masses'. The apparent vagueness of this term is investigated by Raymond Williams who asks 'Who are the masses?', observing that 'In practice, in our society and in this context, they can hardly be other than the working people'.⁸ Historicising these labels and the intent and instances in which they have been employed has something to do with the curiously repetitive unearthing of 'the people' that I mention in the Introduction. Examples of this discovery from the immediate pre-war period include J.B. Priestley's An English Journey (1934), George Orwell's The Road to Wigan Pier (1937), and the Mass Observation project

New York, 1995, pp. 1-18.

⁶ Raphael Samuel, Island Stories: Unravelling Britain: Theatres of Memory, Volume II, Verso, London and New York, p. 225.

⁷ Alan Bullock, Oliver Stallybrass and Stephen Trombley (eds), The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought (Second Edition), Fontana, London, 1988, p. 688.

⁸ Williams, Culture and Society, p. 288. As John Carey demonstrates however, definitions of 'the masses' have also included 'the clerks' and 'suburbanites' - as well as those more familiarly thought of as the working classes. See: John Carey, The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880-1939, Faber and Faber, London and Boston, 1992.

(1937-).⁹ As Piers Brendon suggests in his popular history of the 1930s The Dark Valley, each generation has had to discover anew the outcast areas of the country and the people of the abyss, 'which were cut off socially, physically and psychologically from the rest of the country'.¹⁰ Of course, what concerns us is *who* were the discoverers and discovered, what was the nature of their relationship and indeed, what was found?

There is an extensive literature dealing with the manner in which the working class was objectified by the social investigators, reformers and theorists of the Victorian era.¹¹ The proximity of the modern labour force to the factory and machine - perhaps viewed as their by-product - their insalubrious habitat in urban slums, these presented a condition that seemed to speak of an opaque essence. John Tagg outlines the portentous, often Biblical imagery employed in contemporary descriptions, both sympathetic and hostile, showing that 'Dwellers in the slums were to be pitied for living beyond the reach of Civilisation and Grace, but they were also feared to be reveling in the blackness of their unseen abyss which nurtured sin and

⁹ Established by poet/journalist Charles Madge, documentary filmmaker Humphry Jennings and anthropologist Tom Harrison. See: Tom Jeffery, Mass-Observation : A Short History, University of Birmingham, Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, stencilled occasional papers : general series, No.55, Birmingham, 1978; James Vernon, 'Telling the Subaltern to Speak: Mass Observation and the Formation of British Social History', mss., University of Manchester, unpublished paper, 1999.

¹⁰ Piers Brendon, The Dark Valley: A Panorama of the 1930s, Jonathan Cape, London, 2000, p. 168. On this matter see also Raphael Samuel's 'North and South' in Island Stories, pp. 153-171.

¹¹ E.g., Gareth Stedman Jones, Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship Between Classes in Victorian Society, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1971; P.J. Keating, The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, Boston and Henley, 1979 (first published 1971); Geoffrey Pearson, Hooligan: A History of Respectable Fears, Macmillan, London, 1983; John Tagg, The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1988; Judith Walkowitz, City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Later Victorian London, London, 1992; Bertrand Taithe (ed.), The Essential Mayhew: Representing and Communicating the Poor, Rivers Oram Press, London, 1996. Most recently Ruth Livesey, 'Women, Class and Social Action in late-Victorian and Edwardian London', University of Warwick, Ph.D., 1999.

disorder'.¹² Such conditions betokened working-class truculence, presenting it as social, political and cultural threat. In Culture and Anarchy (1869) for example, Arnold inveighed against a 'vast residuum' of the working class, 'which, raw and half-developed, has long lain half-hidden amidst its poverty and squalor, and is now issuing from its hiding place ... marching where it likes, breaking what it likes'.¹³

Sympathy and fear conditioned the manner in which the people could be known and dealt with. Tagg reflects upon these issues in his study of how photographic evidence was used to raise philanthropic support for slum clearance projects in nineteenth century Leeds. Orchestrating this project was one Dr. James Spottiswoode Cameron whose progressive zeal rarely evinced a concern with the 'actual interests, experiences and feelings of the people he intends to reform'.¹⁴ The unassailable 'realism' and 'truth' of the photographic record - views of streets, housing and people - were understood to speak for themselves. Unclean, crowded and unhygienic, the essence of working-class life was 'simply self-evident in the images'.¹⁵

Chris Jenks lists a range of writing that ostensibly offered a more nuanced picture, seeking to give voice to the experience and concerns of a marginalised majority. Centered upon London's East End, the 'Victorian "centre" for contemporary cultural studies', there is a dedicated canon of works including Henry Mayhew's London Labour and the London Poor (1861), Charles Booth's Life and Labour of People in London (begun in 1886), Walter Besant's East London (1901)

¹² Tagg, The Burden of Representation, p. 131.

¹³ Matthew Arnold, Culture and Anarchy, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988 (edited and introduced by J. Dover Wilson, 1932, first published 1869), p. 105.

¹⁴ Tagg, The Burden of Representation, p. 129.

and Jack London's People of the Abyss (1902), as well as the popular novels of Charles Dickens and Arthur Morrison, writings by Henry James, George Sims, Andrew Mearns, Friedrich Engels and so on.¹⁶ However, in spite of the aim of such authors it has been suggested that their works were nonetheless marked by a powerful streak of voyeurism, and 'the "zeal for reform" was often accompanied "by a prolonged, fascinated gaze" from the bourgeoisie'.¹⁷ As Tagg observes, ultimately the view of locales like the East End was always framed from without, and 'What could not be known had to be imagined'.¹⁸

Brendon's image of social investigators from Booth onwards, drawing back a curtain on such lives and locations, tends to obscure the manner in which descriptions themselves constructed these places as different and alien. Vilified and romanticised in turn, the taxonomy of 'the people' called them into being, understanding them in particular ways and authorising them to fill a variety of political, social and cultural roles, at the same time underwriting and reifying these very categories. James Vernon summarises this idea, considering the effects of a wealth of social surveys generated in the early part of the twentieth century. He suggests that such surveys did more than merely describe conditions within society; rather they shaped the idea of the social 'operating as technologies of rule which objectified the social and its subjects'.¹⁹ The lives and conditions of slum-dwellers, the malnourished and the unemployed for instance, were the objects of improvement so that they might *properly* operate within and underwrite the domain of politics and

¹⁵ Tagg, The Burden of Representation, p. 141.

¹⁶ Chris Jenks, Culture, Routledge, London, 1995, p. 156.

¹⁷ Griselda Pollock, quoted in Walkowitz, City of Dreadful Delights, p. 16.

¹⁸ Tagg, The Burden of Representation, p. 131.

civilisation. As Vernon suggests, a result of the 156 social surveys commissioned between 1918 and 1935 was the construction of the disenfranchised as ‘passive objects of power, not as acting subjects’.²⁰

The relationship of such investigations with the aims of British Imperialism has not passed without remark.²¹ Discoveries of ‘the people’ paralleled those of the ‘exotic’ natives of colonial territories. Even in the 1930s it was possible to take a sightseeing trip to the East End conducted by Thomas Cook. This was an enduringly exotic place, for many ‘as unknown to us as the Trobriand Islands’.²² Indeed, there is a remarkable confluence between the assumptions and strategies employed in dealing with these disparate groups. In his pre-history of cultural studies, Tom Steele illustrates the lessons learned by those seeking to anglicise the Other, who was to be found at home as much as in overseas colonies. He writes that in India for instance, one aristocrat ‘had “observed” the same characteristics in the English working class as she had seen in Muslims and Hindus: immorality, sensuality, self-indulgence, corruption and depravity. She compared the situation in India with England, mobilising the colonial metaphor of “those living in the dark recesses of our great cities at home”’.²³

Here, we can begin to map the role of culture in these relations, implicit in the qualitative distinction between *these* lives and those touched by the ‘sweetness

¹⁹ Vernon, ‘Telling the Subaltern to Speak’, p. 4.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5. See also David Vincent, Poor Citizens: the State and the Poor in Twentieth Century Britain, Longman, Harlow, 1991.

²¹ See Martin Carnay, Education as Cultural Imperialism, Longmans, New York, 1974, and Gauri Viswanathan, Masks of Conquest, Columbia University Press, New York, 1990. Both are discussed by Tom Steele, The Emergence of Cultural Studies, 1945-65: Cultural politics, Adult Education and the English Question, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1997, pp. 49-71.

²² H. Massingham, I Took Off My Tie (1936), quoted in Brendon, The Dark Valley, p. 168.

²³ Steele, The Emergence of Cultural Studies, p. 57.

and light' of Arnold's definition. His own philanthropic zeal to benefit 'as many people as possible' is conveyed in the assertion that 'the men of culture are the true apostles of equality'.²⁴ These are those who have evinced a passion for diffusing the best knowledge and ideas of their time; 'who have laboured to divest knowledge of all that was harsh, uncouth, difficult, abstract, professional, exclusive; to humanise it'.²⁵ Politically and socially disinterested, certainly untainted by class interest, 'culture' is presented as the transcendent site of perfection and achievement. Its definition in this context however, could be nothing but the opposite. Thus, the circumscribed nature of that philanthropy is indicated in culture's 'special utility for the circumstances in which we find ourselves'.²⁶ It is enlisted for the alleviation of social and political tensions, in support of those 'repressing anarchy and disorder'.²⁷ It was the working classes themselves who were harsh and uncouth, difficult in their political and social aims when organised, anarchic and vulgar in their leisure, lives and philosophies. As Chris Baldick has argued, culture - poems, prose, drama: 'the best which has been thought and said in the world' - presented a means of softening and humanizing these *masses*.²⁸

The contribution of Culture and Anarchy was resonant, influential and timely, coming between the Franchise Act of 1867 and The Education Act of 1870

²⁴ Arnold, Culture and Anarchy, p. 69.

²⁵ Ibid, p. 70.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 202.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 203.

²⁸ Chris Baldick, The Social Mission of English Criticism 1848-1932, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1987, p. 63. See also, Margaret Mathieson, The Preachers of Culture: A Study of English and Its Teachers, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1975; Ian Hunter, Culture and Government: The Emergence of Literary Education, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1988 and Brian Doyle, English and Englishness, Methuen, London, 1989.

which sought provide a system of public education.²⁹ Appropriately then, the wider assumptions and prejudices that Arnold articulated can be traced throughout the development of state education, most coherently in enduring debates about the teaching of the English language. As a number of studies have argued the idea of English has been predicated on an absolute, platonic ideal, ultimately guided by notions of propriety and morality.³⁰ It is the sense informing George Sampson's signal book of 1921, English for the English. A progressive, determinedly *against* rote learning, pointlessly misleading Latinate grammar and the enlistment of English to utilitarian ends by business and industry, Sampson was a true evangelist for the subject. For him, 'What the teacher has to consider is not the minds he can measure but the souls he can save'.³¹ Exactly *whose* souls needed saving and from what is revealing. In the scenario he describes, the teacher finds himself confronting the 'forces of evil', which were more likely to be at large in Hoxton than in Harrow, dwelling amongst the schools of the poor than the privileged. Thus, in London's elementary schools, 'You will notice first of all, that, in the human sense, our boys and girls are almost inarticulate. They can make noises, but they cannot speak ... you can barely recognise your native language'.³² Schools may embark upon good works but the 'surroundings of street and home' will be teaching 'bad English'; the

²⁹ The conjunction of the two is discussed by Brian Simon in Education and the Labour Movement: 1870-1920, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1980, p. 11 ff

³⁰ See: Tony Crowley, The Politics of Discourse: The Standard Language Question in British Cultural Debates, Macmillan, Houndmills, Basingstoke, 1989; Gerry Knowles, A Cultural History of the English Language, Arnold, London et al, 1997, and Dick Leith, A Social History of English, Routledge, London, 1983.

³¹ George Sampson, English for the English: A Chapter on National Education, Cambridge University Press, London, 1970 (first published 1921), p. 19.

³² Ibid, p. 39.

teacher, assailed by almost insuperable hostility struggles not against ignorance but 'evil knowledge'.

Like Arnold, Sampson offered a means of mitigating class antagonism via the installation of a *common* culture, the basis of which lay in a common *tongue*. He was sincere in his belief in the dissemination of 'good' English language and literature as a humanising agent, a palliative for 'the masses' condemned to a dull and dulling existence in brutal and brutalising work. However, there was also an implication in this that some groups were clearly *not* English and not human (the two terms being interchangeable) in the same sense as his implied readership. Such assumptions seem entirely guileless regarding the entailing project of an internal colonisation of the nation where a humane education meant, amongst other things, the installation of Standard English in the place of other accents and dialects. It implied: 'An acquaintance with law and order, with sanctions and implicit prohibitions, a submission to grace and strength and economy and power, and the recognition of a force that can disregard old laws and make a law of its own'.³³

Despite its claim that the aim was not to suppress local character or dialect, the famous 'Newbolt Report' of 1920 had said something similar. The business of the Elementary School, it argued, was to teach all pupils who spoke with a dialect, or 'whose speech is disfigured by vulgarisms, to speak Standard English ... a pronunciation free from provincialisms'.³⁴ Such ideas were transmitted widely, reaching teachers through a proliferating range of manuals offering practical advice

³³ Sampson, English for the English, p. 50.

³⁴ Board of Education Departmental Committee to Inquire into the Position of English in the Educational System of England. The Teaching of English in the Educational System of England ('The Newbolt Report'), HMSO, London, 1921, p. 66.

and tips. A contemporary series under the editorship of Enid Blyton observed that: 'In better-class districts where children come from more cultured homes, where their elders not only speak Standard English, but converse intelligently in the presence of the children far less time and thought need be given in lessons in speech training'.³⁵ In countering 'lip-laziness' and 'slurring', the crimes of the poverty-stricken child, a wider pathology was being described and dealt with. At issue was whether the majority were in fact talking *at all*, or had anything of value or an intelligence to communicate.³⁶

Outside of the schoolroom and institutions such as the armed forces, it was within the organisation and practices of the BBC that such notions were perpetuated and disseminated on a grand scale. Here linguistic authority went hand in hand with the Corporation's assumption of the position of national arbiter of taste.³⁷ It has been suggested that the period from its establishment in 1926 until about 1954 can be thought of as one of conformity in the use and unequivocal acceptance of Received Pronunciation (RP) as 'the "natural" way to communicate'.³⁸ This accent was validated for its seemingly non-regional qualities; as the obvious qualifier of written Standard English, it was accepted (though this was never proven empirically) as the most widely understood of accents.

³⁵ R.K. and M.I.R. Polkinghorne, Modern Teaching: Practical Suggestions for Junior and Senior Schools Volume 3: Junior English (General Editor: Enid Blyton), The Home Library Book Company, George Bewnes Ltd, London, 1929 (3rd Edition), p. 118.

³⁶ See Crowley, The Politics of Discourse, p. 217.

³⁷ E.g.: Anthony Smith (Compiler/editor), British Broadcasting, David and Charles, Newton Abbot, 1974, p. 62, and Paddy Scannell and David Cardiff, A Social History of British Broadcasting, Basil Blackwell, London, 1991, pp. 3-19.

³⁸ G.Leitner, 'The Social Background of the Language of Radio' in Howard Davis and Paul Walton (eds), Language, Image, Media, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1983, p. 61

In his deconstruction of the idea of culture in The Long Revolution (1961) Raymond Williams identifies the factors connecting and policing its parameters. His formulation of a 'selective tradition' describes the manner in which social ideas and cultural works, wider structures of feeling, undergo a filtration and historicisation. As he suggests: 'The selective tradition thus creates, at one level, a general human culture; at another level, the historical record of a particular society; at a third level, most difficult to accept and assess, a rejection of considerable areas of what was once a living culture'.³⁹ This selectivity involves an ongoing *interpretation* of the nature of society, history and change. It serves to maintain the hegemony of the bourgeoisie, its ideas presented as self-evident truths – 'common-sense'.

While this formulation is suggestive when contemplating the 'material' cultural heritage, the validation, preservation and dissemination of texts, paintings, buildings and so on, Williams also draws attention to the historical development of the English language, how it is processed in similar ways. Consider, for instance, Sampson's commonsensical assertion that 'There is no need to define Standard English speech. We know what it is, and there's an end on't'(sic).⁴⁰ However, it has been suggested that on the contrary, 'The Standard Language issue is one which has bedevilled discussions around education in Britain ... It has been the source of lamentable confusion and dangerous muddle-headedness in crucial debates'.⁴¹ This confusion has to do with the distinction between the standard *written* language and how it is *spoken*: different things entirely. On the point of speech, debates have been

³⁹ Raymond Williams, The Long Revolution, Pelican, Harmondsworth, 1961, p. 68.

⁴⁰ Sampson, English for the English, p. 63.

⁴¹ 'Language, Class and Education' in Lucy Burke, Tony Crowley and Alan Girvin (eds), The Routledge Language and Cultural Theory Reader, Routledge, London and New York, 2000, p. 445.

qualitative in nature yet linguists suggest that all dialects are able to communicate equally well; it is convention that accords authority to 'educated' speech and confuses it with either superior intellect or morality. Prestige and misconceptions have accrued around Standard English and Received Pronunciation, socio-cultural habits creating a hierarchy of dialects and accents. Determined by distinctions of class and region, linguistic ideas have involved an arbitrary distinction of the parameters of 'correctness', of 'good' and 'pure' English. As Williams notes indignantly: 'In its name, thousands of people have been capable of the vulgar insolence of telling other Englishmen that they do not know how to speak their own language'.⁴²

In later periods of social strife Arnoldian notions of the 'special utility' of culture had obvious application. During the 1930s, pursuits such as play-acting, choral work, music and art were encouraged in distressed economic areas by a variety of voluntary organisations, the National Council of Social Services and charities like the Carnegie, York and Pilgrim Trusts. Key to the establishment of CEMA, the Pilgrim Trust was founded in 1930 upon a £2million bequest from an anglophile American tycoon called Edward S. Harkness. Its initial brief was to help conserve the social, material and artistic heritage of Great Britain - land of the Pilgrim Fathers. The board of trustees - including such luminaries as Stanley Baldwin, John Buchan and former Lord Advocate Lord Macmillan - promoted the preservation of 'national treasures': ancient buildings, works of art and archives. An early proponent of urban reclamation, its 'aesthetic propaganda' was directed at cleaning polluted waste ground for communal benefit, a reflection of the way in

⁴² Williams, The Long Revolution, p. 247.

which its funds were quickly set to relieving the country's 'more urgent needs' that were presented by the depression.⁴³ Underwriting groups like the WEA and YMCA in places such as Tyneside and the Rhondda, it supported programmes that involved drama, wireless-making, the teaching of languages and dressmaking. Inevitably, it proceeded with an unavoidable tone of condescension towards the mainly working-class recipients of its efforts, its remedies often concerned with problems raised by the increased leisure of the unemployed: 'purposelessness' and the 'general decay of cultural standards'.⁴⁴ Places such as Quinn Square in London's Southwark received attention due to the fact that historically, it had proven to be a site of poverty, deplorable housing as well as crime and drunkenness. In one report the Trust drew attention to the lives of Tyneside juveniles 'among whom a laxity in moral standards and a spread of gambling have noticeably increased in recent years'.⁴⁵

Williams' work illustrates the outlook of this kind of approach and the limited vistas of so many 'men of culture', from Arnold, through to Sampson and most famously F.R. Leavis and his acolytes. The literary perfection of Leavis' 'great tradition' for example, predicated on the 'possibilities of a training taste and sensibility', was a projection of a rather narrow, sectional cultural hierarchy.⁴⁶ Expressing a disdain for the 'found' culture and pleasures of the lives of the majority, this training was designed to resist the vulgarities and degradations of an ersatz 'mass' culture - radio, cinema, newspapers, popular songs, advertising and so

⁴³ Pilgrim Trust Fifth Annual Report, 1935, p. 8.

⁴⁴ Men Without Work: A Report Made to the Pilgrim Trust, Cambridge University Press, 1938 (Reissued by Greenwood Press, New York, 1968), p. 293. This was its own survey of the effects of unemployment.

⁴⁵ Pilgrim Trust Eighth Annual Report, 1938, p. 10.

⁴⁶ Leavis, F.R. and Thompson, Denys, Culture and Environment: The Training of Critical Awareness, Chatto and Windus, London, 1959 (first published 1933), p. 1.

on. Thus, a repeated impression is that amongst the ‘refined’ the feeling was actually that the extension of culture and its appurtenances was in need of guarding *against* the diluting effects of democracy. Democracy in fact ‘has too often meant the triumph of mass thinking, mass behaviour and a rather dull level of mediocrity’.⁴⁷ This antipathy is evident in the antinomies of Leavis’ own Mass Civilization and Minority Culture (1930) and the ultimate reliance upon the discrimination of ‘a very small minority’ as guardians and arbiters of taste and value.⁴⁸ For Queenie Leavis this position went hand in hand with a lament for the days when ‘people’ knew their place.⁴⁹ The ethos and currency of this priority was well captured by the poet Louis MacNeice in his Autumn Journal (1939) when he wrote that:

... *habit makes me*
Think victory for one implies another’s defeat,
That freedom means the power to order, and that in order
To preserve the values dear to the élite
The élite must remain a few. It is hard to imagine
A world where the many would have their chance
without
A fall in the standard of intellectual living
*And nothing left that the highbrow cared about.*⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Kenneth Lindsay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Education), 5 April 1940, Parliamentary Debates: Fifth Series - Volume 358. House of Commons Official Reports, HMSO, London, 1940, col. 260.

⁴⁸ F.R. Leavis, Mass Civilization and Minority Culture, Minority Press, Cambridge, 1930, p. 3.

⁴⁹ See: Q.D. Leavis, Fiction and the Reading Public, Chatto and Windus, London, 1932, p. 185 ff.

⁵⁰ Louis MacNeice, Autumn Journal, Faber and Faber, London, 1996 (first published 1939), p. 9. Here this conviction is being undermined. It was later restated most famously by T.S. Eliot in Notes Towards the Definition of Culture, Faber and Faber, London, 1972 (first published 1948). The most useful work on this issue is Carey, The Intellectuals and the Masses.

Brendon suggests that the urbane convention that characterised British political life between the wars disguised 'the instinctive authoritarianism of governments which had hardly come to terms with democracy'.⁵¹ The deep social divisions, exacerbated by economic depression and labour disputes were similarly masked. Whatever the variety presented by 'the many', *their* lives, values, and standards had little 'power to order' or determine social and cultural meanings.

In the 1930s, as the cultural correspondents of the Daily Worker were wont to complain, what was available of any standard or in any medium was undermined by a 'remoteness from the lives of the people'.⁵² As some of those engaged in the Mass Observation project observed at the time: 'the whole apparatus for expressing "PUBLIC OPINION" is no such thing, if we are to include the millions of workers as "PUBLIC"'.⁵³ For example, the stated desire of the BBC to remain aloof from sectional interests was somewhat disingenuous. The limits and possibilities of its role were advertised during the General Strike of 1926 when even Winston Churchill found that it was not necessary to commandeer it for propaganda purposes. John Reith, the founding Director General, famously stated after the event that 'Since the BBC was a national institution and since the Government in this crisis was acting for the people ... *the BBC was for the Government in the Crisis too*'.⁵⁴ While the BBC did not invent the social prejudice upon which it was founded it did

⁵¹ Brendon, The Dark Valley, p. 43. For a key first-hand account of the period detailing a dissenting political culture and the nature of its repression that resulted in the establishment in 1934 of the Council for Civil Liberties see Sylvia Scaffardi, Fire Under the Carpet: Working for Civil Liberties in the 1930s, Lawrence and Wishart, 1986.

⁵² David E. Thomas, Daily Worker, 9 May 1938, quoted in Peter Stead, Film and the Working Class: The Feature Film in British and American Society, Routledge, London and New York, 1991, p. 104.

⁵³ Quoted in Vernon, 'Telling the Subaltern to Speak', p. 5.

⁵⁴ For a discussion see James Curran and Jean Seaton, Power Without Responsibility: The Press and Broadcasting in Britain (Fourth Edition), Routledge, London, 1992, pp. 131-150.

a lot to perpetuate and spread it, particularly via its cultural paternalism. As Reith opined, 'few know what they want, and very few what they need'.⁵⁵

Yet the history of cultural encounter and objectification, the management of boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, is paralleled by attempts to give authentic and coherent voice to working class experience, to install them as subjects, active agents in the public sphere. Based upon notions of a discrete and valid culture, expressive of a distinct ideological foundation, its roots lie in the aims and objectives of Chartism.⁵⁶ The role of Chartists in generating a radical press, cultivating working-class solidarity and identifying common interests, is well-documented and as Paul Thomas Murphy has most recently argued, working-class aesthetic values and sensibilities were also conceived as distinct as their political ones within this movement.⁵⁷ In his address 'To the Young men of the Working Classes', the Leicestershire activist Thomas Cooper advised of the necessity: 'that you all join hands and head to create a literature of your own. Your own prose, your own poetry'; its aim, to 'put you all more fully in possession of each other's thoughts ... and a clearer perception of what you can do when united'.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Quoted in Curran and Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility*, p. 139.

⁵⁶ See: Asa Briggs (ed.), *Chartist Studies*, Macmillan, London, 1959, a work whose publication date is instructive in the context of this thesis. In the same vein, see Dorothy Thompson, *The Early Chartists*, Macmillan, London, 1971. More recently see John Host, *Victorian Labour History: Experience, Identity and the Politics of Representation*, Routledge, London, 1998.

⁵⁷ Paul Thomas Murphy, *Towards a Working-Class Canon: Literary Criticism in British Periodicals, 1816-1858*, Ohio State University Press, Columbus, 1994. See also Martha Vicinus, *The Industrial Muse: A Study of Nineteenth Century British Working-Class Literature*, Croom Helm, London, 1974; Ian Haywood (ed.), *The Literature of Struggle: An Anthology of Chartist Fiction*, Scolar Press, Aldershot, 1995 and Steve Devereux, 'Chartism and Popular Fiction', in John Lucas (ed.), *Writing and Radicalism*, Longman, London, 1996, pp. 128-149. Alongside Chartist verse and doggerel, P.J. Keating places the work of regional poets (both in dialect and non-dialect), and the memoirs of working-men; Keating, *The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction*, p. 3. On the *autobiographical* tradition see: David Vincent, *Bread Knowledge and Freedom: A Study of Nineteenth Century Working Class Autobiography*, Methuen, London, 1981.

⁵⁸ Quoted in Vicinus, *The Industrial Muse*, p. 1.

The object was not only that of generating an *alternative* cultural vision but of making available the extant tradition to the proletariat. In The Condition of the Working Class in England (1845), Friedrich Engels lauded the manner in which Chartists, Trades Unionists and Socialists had founded independent schools and reading-rooms, where it was possible ‘to receive a purely proletarian education, free from all the influences of the bourgeoisie’.⁵⁹ For Engels, ‘bourgeois morality’ impeded the proper appreciation of ideas or authorised the bowdlerisation of literature - of Shelley ‘the genius, the prophet’ and Byron ‘with his glowing sensuality and his bitter satire upon our existing society’. For Robert Blatchford in Merrie England (1894), one of the greatest crimes of the rich man was ‘that he keeps hoarded up in his house a number of things that ought to be the common heritage of the people’.⁶⁰ Art was necessary to human fulfillment, something denied to the working classes. Material improvements - better wages, housing, conditions - were not enough, ‘They need *leisure*. They need culture. They need humane and rational amusement. They need the chance to exercise those “splendid ambitions and aspirations”’.⁶¹

Here, it is possible to consider how the idea of an authentic working-class aesthetic vision accorded with the spirit and uses of Culture (or *High Culture*). Both articulated the possibilities of human freedom and fulfillment. For radicals, Culture anticipated the socialist Millennium, conveying its qualities or at least something of how it might *feel*. A key point also concerns the prescriptive approach to the *rational*

⁵⁹ Friedrich Engels, Extract from The Condition of the Working Class in England (1845) in Martin Hoyles (ed.), The Politics of Literacy, Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative, London, 1977, p. 59.

⁶⁰ Robert Blatchford, Merrie England, Walter Scott, London, 1894, p. 181.

and profitable use of leisure. In statements like Blatchford's there is much that enjoins with those fearful of the masses and their predilection for 'a few third-rate pictures, a theatre or two where you have the choice between vulgar burlesque and morbid melodrama ... wretched music halls ... plenty of public houses'.⁶² Freed from bourgeois surveillance Culture presented the same universal, transcendent and humanising essence lauded by Arnold et al. For the communal self-help group or individual working-class autodidact, its possession illuminated both the limitations of the bourgeoisie and the second-rate quality of the material usually provided for and preferred by their peers. The latter could only be designed for distraction from a proper consciousness of the world and one's interests and role in it.⁶³

A variety of cultural forms were important to the developing socialist movement in all of its variety. Music in particular played an important role in the demonstrations, meetings and lectures of the Independent Labour Party, Clarion League and Co-op Guilds.⁶⁴ For the Fabians dramatic works proved to be a vehicle for progressive ideals or the discussion of social problems, for the Co-ops a means of education and improvement.⁶⁵ These activities found expression in a number of grassroots organisations and the establishment of enduring groups such as the People's Theatre of Newcastle upon Tyne, founded in 1911 as an offshoot of the

⁶¹ Blatchford, Merrie England, p. 149.

⁶² Ibid., p. 42.

⁶³ On the working-class autodidact see Vicinus, The Industrial Muse; Jonathan Rée, Proletarian Philosophers: Problems in Socialist Culture in Britain, 1900-1940, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1984 and Patrick Joyce, Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class, 1848-1914, Cambridge, 1991, pp. 215-304. On leisure see Chris Waters, British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture, 1884-1914, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1990 and also for subsequent developments and continuities Stephen G. Jones, The British Labour Movement and Film, 1918-1939, Routledge, London and New York, 1987, pp. 37-58.

⁶⁴ For a recent survey see Duncan Hall, "A Pleasant Change From Politics": The Musical Culture of the British Labour Movement, 1918-1939', PhD, University of Warwick, 2001.

⁶⁵ On Fabianism see Ian Britain, Fabianism and Culture: A Study in British Socialism and the Arts c.

British Socialist Party.⁶⁶ Plays aiming to impart political propaganda, dealing with socialist subjects, were a concern of the National Association of Clarion Dramatic Clubs which, from 1912, proselytised via such works as Sackville Martin's Women's Rights, Landon Ronald's Recognition of the Union and Norman Tiptaft's Evolution.⁶⁷

Significantly, it was the Russian Revolution of 1917 that crystalised and invigorated radical ideas of workers' culture, ossifying theoretical approaches to the concept.⁶⁸ Bolshevik denunciations of all things bourgeois gave direction to artists in all media who sought to apply Marxist principles to their work, engineering progressive and *properly* political art forms in the service of the masses.⁶⁹ Groups announced their political alignment, aiming to inspire with gritty titles such as 'Smithy', 'October', 'On Guard', 'At the Post', 'Litfront', and 'Blue Blouses'. Propelled by the October revolution this vanguard had been anticipated and authorised by Prole-Cult (*Proletarian-Culture*). This organization was formed in 1909 by Bolshevik exiles from Russia such as A.V. Lunacharsky and Maxim Gorky as a contribution to revolutionary theory. While unions and party sought to provide economic and political philosophies and policies, this group sought to consider cultural issues. The aim was to 'introduce organisation - i.e. consciousness and plan -

1884-1918, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1982.

⁶⁶ See: Norman Veitch, The People's: Being a History of the People's Theatre, Newcastle upon Tyne, Northumberland Press, Gateshead on Tyne, 1950, and Andrew Davies, Other Theatres: The Development of Alternative and Experimental Theatre in Britain, Macmillan Education, London, 1987.

⁶⁷ See Raphael Samuel, 'Editorial Introduction: Documents and Texts from the Workers' Theatre Movement (1928-1936)', History Workshop Journal, No.4, Autumn 1977, p. 104.

⁶⁸ E.g., see Pamela Fox, Class Fictions: Shame and Resistance in the British Working-Class Novel, 1890-1945, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 1994, p. 50 ff.

⁶⁹ See: Berel Lang and Forest Williams (eds), Marxism and Art, David McKay, New York, 1972; Stephen Bann (ed.), The Tradition of Constructivism, Thames and Hudson, London, 1974; Anna Lawton (ed.), The Red Screen: Politics, Society, Art in Soviet Cinema, Routledge, London, 1992.

into the fashioning of proletarian culture ... in such a way that the proletariat can equip itself with new knowledge, express its emotions through new art, and transform its social relations in a real spirit ... of collective collaboration in labour'.⁷⁰

The theory and practices designed to generate proletarian culture were exported and disseminated throughout the socialist international, eagerly received and extended amongst activists in Germany, France, the USA, and elsewhere.⁷¹ In Britain between the wars groups within the small yet enormously energetic Communist Party (CPGB) generated radical cultural activities under the aegis of the Workers' Theatre Movement (WTM) (1928-1936). The debt owed by activists to the optimism and experimentation of the first years of Soviet Russia is conveyed in the titles of a variety of companies that, in the absence of finance, the WTM supported with ideas, scripts, strategies and theory. Many of them were London-based: 'Streatham Red Front', 'Lewisham Red Players', 'Greenwich Red Blouses', 'Becontree Reds', 'Reds of Dagenham', and 'Proltet', a Yiddish-speaking group of the East End. Others groups were active all over the country, in the familiar industrial areas 'from Bristol to Dundee, from Rochdale to Reading'.⁷² In Salford there were the 'Red Megaphones', in Wigan 'The Dark Lamps' while 'Red Cops' travelled the Rossendale Valley. Along with later professional companies such as

⁷⁰ Quoted in Hoyles (ed.), The Politics of Literacy, Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative, London, 1977, p. 57.

⁷¹ See W.L. Guttsman, Workers' Culture in Weimar Germany: Between Tradition and Commitment, Berg, New York, Oxford, Munich, 1990; Richard Stourac and Kathleen Macree, Theatre as a Weapon: Workers Theatre in the Soviet Union, Germany and Britain 1917-1934, London, Routledge, 1986 and Michael Denning, The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century, Verso, London, 1998.

⁷² Tom Thomas, 'A Propertyless Theatre for the Propertyless Class', History Workshop Journal, No.4, 1977, p. 121. In Britain a key text disseminating ideas was Eden and Cedar Paul, Proletcult,

‘Unity’, ‘Left Theatre’, the ‘West Ham United Front’ troupe and even ‘Group Theatre’, they all sought to combine an appeal to working-class audiences with new modes of presentation – often of current issues.⁷³ Handbills and requests for support by Manchester’s ‘Theatre of Action’, which grew out of the local ‘Clarion Players’ and ‘Red Megaphones’ proclaimed that: ‘the very class which plays the chief part in contemporary history ... is detracted from expression in the present day theatre. This theatre will perform, mainly in working-class districts, plays which express the life and struggle of the workers. Politics, in its fullest sense, means the affairs of the people’.⁷⁴

However, there was a glaring problem with this whole notion of class-based culture. For Leon Trotsky such work was an irrelevance and theoretically illogical.⁷⁵ He argued that if a dominant bourgeois consciousness and culture are the corollary of capitalist modes of production, then how could one formulate a socialist-workers culture *prior* to actual socialist conditions? The working class had no culture to speak of – at least in a conventional *aesthetic* sense. Working-class expression was merely political, signalled in collective activities such as trade unionism. The paradox implied by ‘proletarian art’ was also underlined by British literary critic William Empson, who offered a definition of it as ‘the propaganda of a factory-

Leonard Parsons, London, 1921. For a discussion see: Rée, Proletarian Philosophers, pp. 21-2.

⁷³ See for instance: Colin Chambers, The Story of Unity Theatre, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1989; Howard Goorney and Ewan MacColl (eds), Agit-prop to Theatre Workshop: Political Playscripts 1930-50, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1986; R. Samuel, E. MacColl and Stuart Cosgrove, Theatres of the Left: 1880-1935, Routledge, London, 1985; Michael J. Signal, Dances of Death: The Group Theatre of London in the Thirties, Faber and Faber, London, 1984, and Steven Nicholson, British Theatre and the Red Peril: The Portrayal of Communism: 1917-1945, University of Exeter Press, Exeter, 1999.

⁷⁴ Quoted in Howard Goorney, The Theatre Workshop Story, Eyre Methuen, London, 1981, p. 11.

⁷⁵ See Paul N. Siegel (ed.), Leon Trotsky: On Literature and Art, Pathfinder Press, New York, 1970, pp. 41-54. See also Lee Baxandall and Stefan Marawski, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, On Literature and Art, International General, New York, 1974.

working class which feels its interests opposed to the factory owners'. As he suggested, 'You couldn't have proletarian literature in this sense in a successful socialist state'.⁷⁶

These issues impacted upon the way in which the relationship of creativity, culture and class were understood, placing prior demands upon the what could be said and how it could be said. What kind of place could there be for fantasy, personal desire, for non-political, *non-work* related subjects, artistic abstraction and the very concept of the aesthetic in proletarian art? After all, these concepts - including that of 'art' - could be labelled 'bourgeois'. Thus, some groups aimed to revive popular traditions: like Leavis they looked back to a pre-capitalist golden age of 'people's theatre' where there was little distinction between audience, players and the nature of the material. In this vein, some sought to make canonic works widely available as the heritage of all. Others were more uncompromising, rejecting 'bourgeois' culture on pragmatic grounds and claiming that 'We are not out to raise the aesthetic standards of the workers nor to develop artistic theories of working class art; our job is to spread the revolution'.⁷⁷ Samuel describes the WTM's rejection of what they termed the 'theatre of illusion' in favour of a pithy and didactic 'theatre of ideas'. Instead of full-length material that was likely to be too complex for audiences, or too hard to produce, they performed sketches, satires, mime and song where the message was paramount.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ William Empson, Some Versions of Pastoral, Chatto and Windus, London, 1935, p. 6.

⁷⁷ J. Morris, 'Do We Agree?', Red Stage, February 1932, quoted in Jones, The British Labour Movement and Film, p. 198 (n. 28). On the hostility of some in the CPGB to cultural questions see Rée, Proletarian Philosophers, p. 50.

⁷⁸ R. Samuel (ed.), 'Documents and Texts from the Workers Theatre Movement (1928-1936)', History Workshop Journal, No.4, 1977, p. 107. See also, Steven Nicholson, British Theatre and the Red Peril, p. 92.

Accounts of this period from 'Theatre of Action's' Joan Littlewood and Ewan MacColl (né Jimmy Miller) give some idea of the individual energy that went into this work and the enormous obstacles they faced: social, political and practical.⁷⁹ Sometimes opting for naturalistic 'slice-of-life' presentations they were often experimental in choice of material and technique. Although highly innovative themselves, like many radical dramaturgists they looked to Soviet and German use of montage and 'Agit-Prop'. They were early importers of the work of Berthold Brecht and American writers such as Clifford Odets, Eugene O'Neill and Upton Sinclair. Given the contentious and confrontational nature of their material, and the fact that early WTM activities were produced at the site of demonstrations and strikes, groups met with persecution from the police and prosecution for various offences. A hostile Lord Chamberlain's office enforced censorship of the theatre, vetting all dramatic material intended for public performances, forbidding a number of topics, especially the portrayal of living persons.

Ultimately, to what extent this range of work could be considered *popular* is uncertain, although the struggles recounted by Littlewood and MacColl indicate a general indifference on behalf of those who such work intended to reach. While creatively and intellectually rich, their company suffered from perpetual financial insecurity. But the claim to authority, integrity and authenticity of all of these projects was that they originated from *within* the working-class movement, propelled by autodidacts such as Littlewood and MacColl, Tom Thomas, Charlie Mann, Phil

⁷⁹ See Joan Littlewood, *Joan's Book: Joan Littlewood's Peculiar History as She Tells It*, Methuen, London, 1994; Ewan MacColl, *Journeyman: An Autobiography*, Sidgwick and Jackson, London 1990 and Gorney, *The Theatre Workshop Story*, Eyre Methuen, London, 1981.

Poole and Ray Waterman.⁸⁰ Yet for all of this, the immediate pre-war era is often remembered more for the manner in which a significant number of *middle-class* intellectuals were radicalised. Famously, in his poem 'Spain', W.H. Auden wrote of 'young poets exploding like bombs'. These were those individuals who subscribed, however vaguely, to the political and cultural aims of the CPGB and later of the plural alliance against fascism of the 'Popular Front'. The influential magazine Left Review founded in 1934 by Writers' International, was the focal point of a movement of artists articulating a 'desire to ally themselves more closely with the class that will build socialism'.⁸¹

Within the BBC some were highly critical of its restrictive ethos and direction. Peter Eckersley, Chief Engineer and one of its founders, mocked the redundancy of the Corporation's public service remit, noting how it had instead pandered to political and cultural élites.⁸² In the mid-1930s, after a tour of facilities, the Director of Regional Relations warned of 'the danger inherent in the power and range of broadcasting achieving uniform pattern of thought, of standardising taste and values according to the authoritarian few and "expert" are too obvious to need

⁸⁰ See: Thomas, 'A Propertyless Theatre for the Propertyless Class', pp. 113-127.

⁸¹ Quoted in David Margolies, Writing the Revolution: Cultural Criticism from Left Review, Pluto Press, London, 1998, pp. 1-2. As mentioned in my introduction there is a substantial literature on this area too. For a useful investigation of the progression towards the 1930s see John Lucas, The Radical Twenties: Aspects of Writing, Politics and Culture, Five Leaves Publications, Nottingham, 1997. See also: J. Clark et al, Culture and Crisis in Britain in the 30s, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1979; Andy Croft, Red Letter Days: British Fiction in the 1930s, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1990; Ken Worpole, Dockers and Detectives, Verso, London, 1983, pp. 77-93; Valentine Cunningham, British Writers of the Thirties, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1988; Keith Williams, British Writers and the Media, 1930-45, Macmillan Press, Houndmills, 1996; Peter Miles and Malcolm Smith, Cinema, Literature and Society: Elite and Mass Culture in Interwar Britain, Croom Helm, London, 1987. Also in need of inclusion is an account of the Left Book Club, e.g., Paul Laity's introduction to Left Book Club Anthology, Gollancz, London, 2001.

⁸² As discussed by Kevin Williams, Get Me a Murder A Day: A History of Mass Communication in Britain, Arnold, London, New York, Sydney, Auckland, 1998, p. 108.

elaboration'.⁸³ This was something that 'committed' individuals that were at work within it sought to address. Figures such as Val Gielgud, Lawrence Gilliam, D.G. Bridson, Olive Shapely and later even Louis MacNeice, were all devoted to radio as an artistic medium and one that had a part to play in social extension and reform.

Avowedly metropolitan in its orientation and cultural outlook it was at the margins of the Corporation, 'at a safe distance from the political manipulators', where its limits could be tested.⁸⁴ Stuart Laing has suggested that during the 1930s BBC Regional outposts had opportunities to develop original, distinctive work: 'London, the national service, dealt with material of presumed universal and permanent significance, while the Regions, in a subordinate role, were to reflect "the everyday life and variety of the areas it served"'.⁸⁵ In 1938, the Head of Programmes for the North Region, John Salt, expressed his opposition to the London-centric nature of BBC Radio. He favoured the development of genuine regional character and voices, advocating the establishment of a writing school that would draw upon the 'actuality' of ordinary life for a range of subjects to give radio a new lease of life. Individuals like Shapely and Harding ('a very dangerous man') were exiled to the regions and under Salt's liberal eye developed a range of innovations.⁸⁶ Shapely made programmes such as The Classic Soil (1939) which compared contemporary

⁸³ Quoted in John Davies, Broadcasting and the BBC in Wales, University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 1994, p. 65. Listener surveys of the 1930s discovered that the BBC's tone and programme engendered widespread alienation amongst large sectors of the population - up to three-quarters of all families who possessed sets at the outbreak of war. See Williams, British Writers and the Media, p. 29.

⁸⁴ W. Stephen Gilbert, 'Let the People Speak' (Obituary: Philip Donnellan), Guardian, 1 March 1999, p. 16.

⁸⁵ Stuart Laing, Representations of Working-Class Life: 1957-1964, Macmillan, London, 1986, p. 163. See also Williams, Get Me a Murder A Day, pp.107-9, Williams, British Writers and the Media, p. 34 ff., and Scannell and Cardiff, 'Manchester and its Programmes' (Chapter 15) in A Social History of British Broadcasting, pp. 333-55.

⁸⁶ Philip Donnellan quoted in Gilbert, 'Let the People Speak', p. 16.

working-class life with that of the previous century. Using Engels' The Condition of the Working Class in England as a central motif it 'brought men and women from the farms, mills and mines of the North to the microphone'.⁸⁷ Although rehearsed and scripted, Harding's Harry Hopeful's Northern Tour allowed local people to display a talent or speak their minds on a limited range of topics. The BBC Yearbook of 1938 was both celebratory and patronisingly tongue-in-cheek about it. The novelty of the programme and the way in which the Corporation imposed its own decorum upon the raw material of the world was signalled in the comment that: 'perhaps the year's most significant development has been in the realm of actuality, in particular the "Harry Hopeful" programmes, which have not only brought to microphone *peasants from remote northern districts*, but aimed at imparting to actuality method the rhythm and quality of good studio work'.⁸⁸

Valentine Cunningham and Keith Williams have both discussed the manner in which those of the left responded to the mass media in the 1930s. They imagined its prodigious audience, anonymous and soporific, hoping to awaken them with 'non-bourgeois kinds of art'.⁸⁹ As Peter Stead has written, progressives of the Socialist and Documentary Film Movements like John Grierson attempted to say something about and *for* a working-class constituency. Driven by an actual antagonism towards popular pleasures - Hollywood films for instance - such approaches were often élitist and overtly didactic in intent: 'the mass audience needed to be weaned away from the showmen and offered more serious and

⁸⁷ Littlewood, Joan's Book, p. 106. She and MacColl found employment at the BBC whenever 'proletarian' voices were required for dramas.

⁸⁸ BBC Yearbook. 1936, p. 36, my emphasis.

⁸⁹ Cunningham, British Writers of the Thirties, p. 296 and Williams, British Writers and the Media, p.

instructional films'.⁹⁰ Perhaps this prescriptive approach and the enormous self-consciousness exhibited by the radically aligned culture of the 1930s accounts for the manner in which it quickly acquired a negative reputation. Projects burdened with enormous ideological and aesthetic limitations – e.g. that work be *non-bourgeois* - by implication limited or underestimated the capacity of both culture and audience. As Raymond Williams argues, 'to describe English life, thought, and imagination in the last three hundred years simply as "bourgeois", to describe English culture now as "dying", is to surrender reality to a formula'.⁹¹

George Orwell, an early and scathing critic of the period, sardonically observed how communism was little more than a fashion amongst the literati, claiming that 'As early as 1934 or 1935 it was considered eccentric in literary circles not to be more or less "left"'.⁹² He also pointed to the negative results of prescriptive approaches to culture. For him totalitarianism, the 'marxisation' of writers, led to an inhibiting orthodoxy in the approach to creativity, resulting in a decade virtually

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⁹⁰ Peter Stead, Film and the Working Class: The Feature Film in British and American Society, Routledge, London and New York, 1991, p. 105. See also Bert Hogenkamp, Deadly Parallels: Film and the Left in Britain 1929-39, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1986. A discussion of how far working-class life was or was not represented in British film of the period is in Jones, The British Labour Movement and Film, pp. 22-25.

⁹¹ Williams, Culture and Society, p. 273. Formulaic thinking of the kind Williams decries is found most notoriously in the work of Alick West (e.g. Crisis and Criticism, 1937) and Christopher Caudwell (e.g. Studies in a Dying Culture, 1938), although one does not have to look far to see the pervasiveness and endurance of such positions.

⁹² George Orwell, 'Inside the Whale' in Inside the Whale and Other Essays, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1983 (first published 1940), p. 32. Others drawn to Communism and Marxist philosophy were artists and musicians such as Michael Tippett, Alan Bush, Benjamin Britten, Henry Moore, Jacob Epstein and Eric Gill. Historians included Rodney Hilton, Eric Hobsbawm, Christopher Hill and later E.P. Thompson. Mathematicians too were converted - Hyman Levy, Lancelot Hogben as well as Classicists such as George Thomson, Ben Farrington and Jack Lindsay. Similarly with Scientists: J.B.S. Haldane, J.D. Bernal, P.M.S Blackett, Dorothy Hodgkin; Art historians - Francis Klingender, Anthony Blunt; Journalists - Allen Hutt, Claud Cockburn and also those many in theatre and film - Herbert Marshall, Ivor Montagu, Alfie Bass, Sybil Thorndike, Beatrix Lehmann, Michael Redgrave et al.

‘barren of imaginative prose’.⁹³ Orwell overstated his case but it would also be possible to point to how a variety of media were vetted for their political rectitude and how artists conscientiously eschewed fantasy or abstraction, preferring instead the transparency of a dour realism the inexorable ‘message’ of montage and agit-prop.

There is an important relationship to be outlined here, between the place of the working classes in a radical political narrative and the aestheticisation of them by artists and intellectuals - middle-class (*or otherwise*). Ronald Blythe has written that for intellectuals, the working classes presented an intriguing authenticity lacking in the confines of bourgeois life: ‘For some of the upper-class Marxists ... The proles were beautiful ... like the Fulani or the Dinka’.⁹⁴ Central to any politically committed work was the presence of the working classes as subject, as guarantors of truth, the actors in a narrative whose role was preordained and the conclusion of which was as inevitable as that of classical tragedy. Correspondingly, William Empson observed the manner in which radical art seemed to express older ideas about social relations, that ‘I think good proletarian art is usually Covert Pastoral’.⁹⁵ Books, films, poetry or plays that concentrated on the dignity of labour, John Grierson’s film about herring fishermen Drifters (1929), for example, all of these dealt with those whose lives seemed to be more obviously and grindingly ruled by ‘Fate’.⁹⁶ And, to some degree, ‘Fate’ transposes to interpretations of the Marxist

⁹³ Orwell, ‘Inside the Whale’, p. 131.

⁹⁴ Quoted in Croft, Red Letter Days, p. 28.

⁹⁵ Empson, Some Versions of Pastoral, p. 6.

⁹⁶ There is more to be said about the relationship of Fate, working-class life and its representation. For an exploration of the theme itself in relation to cultural works of the nineteenth century see: Louis James, Fiction for the Working Man, 1830-1850: A Study of the Literature Produced for the Working Classes in Early Victorian Urban England, Oxford University Press, London, 1963.

dialectic and a Millennial Socialist faith, but the main point is that proletarian man, like the simple shepherd of the pastoral form, is allowed a percipient insight into the world. Unencumbered by sophistication or abstraction, in life or in artistic representation, he cannot *but* be the site of truth and authenticity. As classicist and Party theorist George Thomson wrote of his encounter with the fishermen of the Blasket Islands off West Kerry, they taught him ‘things that could not have been learnt from books’.⁹⁷

Whatever the obvious shortcomings of the various perspectives on the issue of culture they were enormously productive, influencing the way in which class and social relations could be thought about. And ultimately it was the coming of war that galvanised and effected significant changes at both social and cultural levels.

ii.

Total War required an equal contribution from all and was fought in the name of all as a ‘people’s war’. As a consequence there had to be considerable reassessment of the role of ‘the people’ and their entitlements, both in war and in anticipation of the inevitable peace. As J.B. Priestley commented dramatically, ‘The new ordeals blast away the old shams. Britain, which in the years immediately before this war was rapidly losing such democratic virtues as it possessed, is now being bombed and burned into democracy’.⁹⁸ In July 1940, The Times considered the rationale for

⁹⁷ George Thomson, ‘Preface to the first edition’, Aeschylus and Athens: A Study in the Social Origins of Drama, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1966 (first published 1941), p. vii.

⁹⁸ J.B. Priestley, quoted in Angus Calder, The People’s War: Britain 1939-1945, Pimlico, London, 1992, p. 163.

continuing the fight against Nazism in these same terms, opining that victory could only be achieved ‘by the creation of common loyalties and by a sense of common values’. The imperative lay in a reformulation of the meaning of freedom and social organisation. European wrongs, it argued, could not be righted if Britain itself did not address its deep divisions: ‘The new order cannot be based on the preservation of privilege, whether the privilege be that of a country, or a class, or of an individual’.⁹⁹

During the war many seized the opportunity to address the need for a renegotiation of social and cultural assumptions. In his Autumn Journal Louis MacNeice anticipated what was to come. Writing of the need to suppress those negative feelings he had articulated so well, he commented that

There is no reason for

thinking

That, if you give a chance to people to think or live,

The arts of life will suffer and become rougher

*And not return more than you could ever give.*¹⁰⁰

Considering the obvious limitations of the BBC, Orwell demanded its necessary ‘humanization and galvanization’ which would involve usurping ‘the effete languors of Langham Place, brazenly masquerading as “Standard English”’.¹⁰¹ Communists of the ‘Popular Front’ like Jack Lindsay and Montagu Slater of Left Review took on jobs that, as Andy Croft argues, ‘enabled them to give semi-official encouragement

⁹⁹ ‘Leader’, The Times, 1 July 1940, p. 5.

¹⁰⁰ MacNeice, Autumn Journal, p. 9.

¹⁰¹ Quoted in George Orwell, ‘Politics and the English Language’ (1946) in Collected Essays, Secker and Warburg, London, 1961, p. 355.

to the construction of the People's Literature that went with a people's war'.¹⁰² Slater was head of scripts at the Ministry of Information Film Unit while Lindsay became script-editor for the play unit of the Army Bureau of Current Affairs (ABCA).

The democratic impulse as it impacted upon the discourse of culture can be traced most interestingly through the short life of the Council for Encouragement of Music and the Arts. CEMA was celebrated by Lindsay as a vindication of the aims of the work of the 1930s, 'The mass of development was astonishing. Things were of course, often sketchy, imperfect; but taken all together, they represented the first clear stages of a people's culture'.¹⁰³ Its importance was recognised by A.J.P Taylor who places its work alongside general expressions of patriotism, the establishment of ABCA, as well as the innovative and inclusive programmes that the BBC *did* produce during wartime as 'expressions of the brief period when the English people felt that they were a truly democratic country'.¹⁰⁴ Similarly, Arthur Marwick considers its formation to have been 'an event of major significance in Britain's twentieth-century history'.¹⁰⁵ However both fail to explore the ethos and practice of this organisation in justification for their assertions.

Where CEMA has been dealt with in any depth is within institutional histories of the Arts Council of Great Britain or in commentaries on the

¹⁰² Croft, *Red Letter Days*, p. 337.

¹⁰³ Jack Lindsay (1956) quoted in Croft, *Red Letter Days*, p. 338.

¹⁰⁴ Taylor, *English History: 1914-1945*, p. 550. He suggests *The Brains Trust* by way of example. A more appropriate list of these broadcast initiatives would include the soap about working-class life called *At the Armstrongs* as well as *Workers Playtime* and *We Speak for Ourselves* in which Wilfrid Pickles met with ordinary people to hear how *they* coped with the privations and stresses of wartime.

¹⁰⁵ Arthur Marwick, *Britain in the Century of Total War: War, Peace and Social Change: 1900-1967*, Bodley Head, London, 1968, p. 298.

effectiveness and philosophy of that organisation.¹⁰⁶ These works offer insights into increases in State patronage of the arts in post-war Britain but are singularly unsatisfactory for any understanding of the significance and meaning of this development in relation to wider social, cultural and economic analyses. John Harris for instance notes that CEMA constituted a remarkable undertaking against a backdrop of ‘six years of bitter conflict and privation’, but has little to say about the originality and *curiousness* of this endeavour other than as part of a history of the accounts of arts funding.¹⁰⁷ To be fair, the objective of this and many of the other works on the subject has not been to ask detailed questions its historical and ideological origins. Exactly *why* funds were made available and, by and large, have been accepted since the last war as part of ‘extension ... of facilities for popular culture ... the legitimate business of a Government’ is, in part, due to CEMA and the opportunities it expressed.¹⁰⁸

Most recently and usefully, F. M. Leventhal has provided a detailed, if somewhat banal empirical account of CEMA’s formation. Here, much is made of the ‘leisurely pace’ of those in Whitehall deliberating policy towards culture at the onset of war.¹⁰⁹ It is argued that there was recognition of the fact that the arts were ‘imperilled’, threatening the livelihood of many professional artists, thus demanding

¹⁰⁶ In, for example, John S. Harris, Government Patronage of the Arts in Great Britain, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1970; Eric W. White, The Arts Council of Great Britain, David-Poynter, London, 1975; Robert Hutchinson, The Politics of the Arts Council, Sinclair Browne, London, 1982; John Pick, Vile Jelly: The Birth, Life and Lingering Death of the Arts Council of Great Britain, Brynmill Press, Gringley-on-the-Hill, 1991; Andrew Sinclair, Arts and Cultures: The History of the 50 Years of the Arts Council of Great Britain, Sinclair-Stevenson, London, 1995.

¹⁰⁷ Harris, Government Patronage of the Arts in Great Britain, p. 19.

¹⁰⁸ Lindsay, Parliamentary Debates: Vol. 358, col. 261.

¹⁰⁹ F.M. Leventhal, “‘The Best for the Most’: CEMA and State Sponsorship of the Arts in Wartime, 1939-1945’, Twentieth Century British History, Vol.1, No.3, 1990, p. 290.

a 'need to act with greater dispatch'.¹¹⁰ Given the circumstances, *why* was this an issue *at all* and in retrospect, what grounds are there for such drama? In the context of the narrative and issues outlined in this chapter I think that there is more to be said about CEMA's role than as a functional response to 'grim prospects for a viable cultural life'.¹¹¹

At the end of hostilities, as CEMA transmuted into the Arts Council, its then Chairman John Maynard Keynes reflected that 'Strange patronage of the arts has crept in. It has happened in a very English, informal, unostentatious way – half-baked if you like'.¹¹² CEMA was born out of an alliance of private and public initiatives when in late 1939 the Board of Education, under Lord De La Warr, began exploring opportunities for how it might play its part in maintaining wartime morale. The Treasury was approached for funding in support of Adult Education which was found to be 'little hindered by the War', hinting at the kinds of relief people sought out in this period.¹¹³ While such 'semi-academic' pursuits were valuable, it was noted that there was little official involvement in the practical activities of the arts. Implicit in these discussions was the very Arnoldian notion of employing culture in a compensatory role during a period of uncertainty and social threat. Thus, when war came, organisations like the paternalistic Pilgrim Trust responded to the emergency with their own initiatives for providing continuity and spiritual relief.

¹¹⁰ Leventhal, "The Best for the Most", p. 291.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 290.

¹¹² Lord Keynes, 'The Arts Council: its Policy and Hopes', *Listener*, July 12 1945, Vol. XXXIV, No. 861, p. 31.

¹¹³ Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts: Minutes and Papers 1939-45, (Formerly situated in Public Record Office, subsequently Victoria and Albert Museum). EL/1. "Cultural Activities in Wartime": memorandum and notes on the informal conference of 18 December 1939', p. 1.

In association with the Ministry of Labour and National Service, the Pilgrim Trust funded a project employing twenty artists who travelled the country 'Recording Britain'. Likewise, Kenneth Clark launched the War Artists' Advisory Committee to record the war, as well as producing a series of lunchtime concerts at the National Gallery (where he was director) in October 1939 in collaboration with Myra Hess.¹¹⁴ On 18 December 1939 Clark was invited along to an informal meeting at the headquarters of the Board at Alexandra House. Also present was Lord Macmillan, Minister of Information and Chairman of the Pilgrim Trust, as well as Thomas Jones (Secretary of the Pilgrim Trust), De La Warr, W.E. Williams, Secretary of the British Institute of Adult Education, and the composer Sir Walford Davies. The latter figure was a 'great popular evangelizer of music', familiar to BBC audiences from his series Music and the Ordinary Listener which began in 1926.¹¹⁵

The meeting had been called in order to address the cultural needs of 'the "consumer" and "producer", the "amateur" and "professional"'. Recognising the variety of projects undertaken by independently operating organisations, it was suggested that the time had come for 'a close definition of the quality and volume of this work ... with a view to pooling experience'. It was felt that what was needed was an officially endorsed initiative, the 'association of such bodies with the Board of Education in a partnership of popular and national culture'. These issues were articulated by Macmillan who spoke as 'Minister of Information, in which capacity he was concerned for the morale of the people, and in the other as Chairman of the Pilgrim Trust through which he was concerned for the position of the arts in war-

¹¹⁴ See Kenneth Clark, The Other Half: A Self-Portrait, J. Murray, London, 1977, pp. 22-7.

¹¹⁵ Scannell and Cardiff, A Social History of British Broadcasting, p. 195.

time'.¹¹⁶ Administered and funded by a grant of £25,000 from the Pilgrim Trust, a Committee for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts was formed the following day with Macmillan assuming the Chair. The rest of the Committee comprised those figures present at the informal meeting, as well as Thelma Cazalet, MP and James Wilkie of the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust. Mary Glasgow, a civil servant at the Ministry of Information (MOI) and a former Assistant Inspector of Schools was appointed Secretary-General.

CEMA's policy emphasised 'first of all the maintenance of the highest possible standard in the arts wherever practised'.¹¹⁷ And in the same way that the Trust had underwritten self-help groups with grants during the previous decade, it was also directed 'to the support of music, painting and drama and to give immediate aid to the various amateur bodies whose activity in these spheres were being threatened'.¹¹⁸ The maintenance of such work would counter boredom and disillusionment, providing inspiration and refreshment in the coming struggle. As standard bearer and progenitor of cultural work it sought to provide 'the best for the most'. In the first instance, support was given to the kind of voluntary organisations that the Trust had established working relations with. These included the Women's Institutes, Townswomen's Guilds, the English Folk Dance and Song Society, Rural Music Schools, Scottish Drama Society, YWCA, British Federation of Music Festivals, National Council of Social Services and the British Institute of Adult Education. Subsequently, it considered applications for financial aid from

¹¹⁶ EL/1. "Cultural Activities in Wartime", p. 2.

¹¹⁷ Pilgrim Trust Ninth Annual Report, 1939, p. 36.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

established theatre companies and orchestras in order to further supplement its mission.¹¹⁹

The kind of activities favoured by CEMA were those that seized the initiative in taking culture to 'the people'. In this vein, and under the direction of Walford Davies, The Rural Music Schools' Council appointed six pioneer 'travellers'. All women, they were to visit a variety of locations in order to give advice and help to all kinds of cultural organisations: 'and everywhere they try to leave behind them others who are able to carry on the work which has been begun'.¹²⁰ From the WEA, Williams brought with him an established scheme called 'Art for the People'. This took exhibitions and lectures to pitheads, munitions factories and the general public of industrial towns. Dr. George Dyson of the Royal College of Music arranged experimental concerts that were presented in the canteens of factories in local industrial areas around London for the benefit of workers. These were then extended to the Midlands, the North and Scotland. Such concerts were short affairs - fifteen minutes perhaps - where a couple of players presented a selection of standards from the classical repertoire. Amateur dramatics was encouraged by one L. Garde du Peche, who sent CEMA advisors out in order to stimulate the formation of local companies. Its touring theatre companies included the 'Pilgrim Players', 'Adelphi Players' and 'Compass Players'. The 'Osiris Players' were an all-female company travelling the country in Rolls Royce cars and able to present any of Shakespeare's plays in any conditions. A Religious Drama Society concentrated on sacred subjects in plays such as T.S. Eliot's Murder in the

¹¹⁹ See Norman Marshall, The Other Theatre, John Lehman, London, 1947, pp. 227-34.

¹²⁰ CEMA Bulletin, No.1, May 1940, p. 3.

Cathedral: 'Travelling very light and living very simply these devotees of a particular kind of theatre have won more than a particular kind of audience'.¹²¹

Musicians were praised for their efforts in providing entertainment and some quality of life to thousands of hard-pressed workers and those seeking relief from the Blitz, perhaps literally helping to calm a potentially frenzied population. As many were bombed out, CEMA arranged emergency concerts for the homeless. Its monthly Bulletin advertised its activities and also served to cement its identity and boost morale amongst its workers. It reported on the way in which its efforts had been gratefully received, 'One woman who had lost everything, home and family, threw her arms round the singer and thanked her for making things seem worth while again. An elderly workman who had seemed bored and uninterested, came up at the end and talked about music and what it meant to him. The applause and the cries of 'Come again!' are always overwhelming'.¹²² Despite such reports and descriptions of audiences 'pathetic in their eagerness', CEMA's approach was not always successful. Some (including Nye Bevan) thought 'cultural' concerts 'too "highbrow" for the factories' and the typical worker.¹²³ Helen Anderson, a music traveller in the North East, recognised this but signalled mitigating circumstances on behalf of audiences when she wrote to HQ that,

I'm sure the only way to give concerts to the workers round here is to put the stuff absolutely in front of them where they work. Its (sic) no good to expect

¹²¹ Pilgrim Trust: Tenth Annual Report, 1940, p. 36.

¹²² CEMA Bulletin, No.6, October 1940, p. 1. It is worth noting also that many of the reports in the Bulletin quote material from the official records used here as well as the various reports from music travellers as evidence of its cultural policy.

¹²³ EL 2/43. Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts: Correspondence: Central. 1939 to 1960. 'Correspondence and Reports from Music Traveller, North East Region: Miss Helen Anderson', Letter: 19 July 1941 to CEMA.

any effort at all from them, they are too tired at the end of a day's work to make any effort at all to get anywhere ... but chiefly I think that they are loath to turn out, especially for a novelty that they don't know much about. I'm afraid it will be slow work building up audiences down Tyneside, but those who did come were really entranced with the concerts, so I feel that they will act as good propagandists.¹²⁴

It was slow work sometimes, yet individuals like Anderson and many others persevered in good faith and good spirit.

Dan Rebellato has suggested that the creation of CEMA and its stress on 'standards' and high culture was the Board of Education's response to the perceived vulgarities of the work of Entertainments National Service Association (ENSA).¹²⁵ An initiative of the Great War, ENSA was revived by theatre impresario Basil Dean and throughout the war had opprobrium heaped upon it for the execrable quality of its shows and performers.¹²⁶ Angus Calder also suggests that the formation of CEMA was to do with 'a quite disinterested desire on the part of the Establishment that war should not crush beauty and the arts which expressed it'.¹²⁷ These are superficial observations, ignoring the fact that CEMA engendered considerable hostility that questioned this very assumption. In January 1940 it was established as an official Council under the Board of Education and applied for substantial aid

¹²⁴ *Ibid.* Letter: 7 April 1941 to CEMA.

¹²⁵ Rebellato, Dan, *1956 and All That: the Making of Modern British Drama*, Routledge, London, 1999, p. 41.

¹²⁶ E.g., 'The raucous comedian perfunctorily snapping up his "feed" lines from the vamping pianist ... the faded soprano with over-large dentures ... the baritone with an air of Blackpool about him'. Basil Dean, *The Theatre at War*, George G. Harrap and Co., London, 1956, p. 137.

¹²⁷ Calder, *The People's War*, p. 510. I am not sure that 'disinterested' is the word as Calder locates CEMA alongside the exemption of books from purchase tax (in 1940) and an élitist favouring of 'living theatre' through limited increases in Entertainment Tax on theatre seats, as opposed to that

from the Treasury, receiving £25,000 to match that of the Pilgrim Trust. Dismissive of the whole enterprise, there were many 'voices raised in protest'.¹²⁸ The Daily Express complained of this expenditure, demanding 'What sort of madness is this? There is no such thing as culture in wartime. Wartime is itself the enemy of culture. And cultural activities, which bring so much benefit to the people in peace, must now be set aside'.¹²⁹

Within the organisation itself there were those who questioned the validity of their work:

There have inevitably been many moments this last week when one has been tempted to chuck the work and go to the nearest A.R.P. post and enroll. The feeling that one may be singing while England is burning is sometimes difficult to withstand, but one is continually being held to the work by the most moving gratitude of those people for whom one does it and for whom one sings. There can be no mistaking the deep sincerity of their thanks - those who say that singing and laughing for an hour has given them new heart and fresh courage and made the black days seem more bearable. In the face of this unanimous testimony one cannot but feel that one is after all making the right contribution.¹³⁰

CEMA put this kind of testimony before its workers in its monthly report, while deploying a plethora of statistics in support of its achievements which seemed to invite awe at its productivity. Between January and June 1940, for instance, it

levied on the more popular cinema.

¹²⁸ 'Leader: Music and the Arts', The Times, 15 June 1940, p 7.

¹²⁹ Daily Express, 13 April 1940, quoted in Marwick, Britain in the Century of Total War, p. 298.

¹³⁰ CEMA Bulletin, No.3, July 1940, p. 3.

crowded that the music travellers had started 371 new orchestral groups, organised 244 choral groups with a resulting 254 concerts and festivals involving an estimated 41,000 people. Arts exhibitions were reported in a similar manner. One in Bridgend reported attendances of 400 per day, Stonehaven 450 and Chelmsford up to 1000 per day, while in Barnsley 4700 attended one event in less than four weeks.¹³¹

In light of public criticisms of CEMA it is also possible to infer the sense of anxiety that lay behind such claims, which sat uneasily alongside a professed dedication to the maintenance of 'standards'. As Mary Glasgow recalls, CEMA policy and practice exhibited 'a built-in conflict between the claims of art and those of social service'.¹³² The provision of 'The best for the most', as its motto went, was an idea at odds with abiding prejudices about the value and *proper* place of Culture. As Leventhal observes, 'To disperse artistic endeavour would be to dilute its content, reducing it to what was popular and accessible, pandering to the lowest common denominator rather perpetuating the esoteric or pursuing the innovative'.¹³³ Similarly, the desire to encourage amateur activities also invited hostility. During the worst days of 1940, as it considered the fall of France and the possibility of invasion, The Times found space to criticise CEMA on these grounds. Its leader writer wondered at the intrinsic value of cultural work at this time but its main concern was the worrying nature of CEMA's conceptualisation of art and what exactly was in need of encouragement. The attention to the amateur seemed to neglect 'those whose lives are given to the arts ... in so far as they [are] found

¹³¹ CEMA Bulletin, No.3, July 1940, p. 3.

¹³² Mary Glasgow, 'The Concept of the Arts Council' in Milo Keynes (ed.), Essays on John Maynard Keynes, Cambridge University Press, London, 1975, p. 262.

¹³³ Leventhal, "The Best for the Most", p. 293.

worthy of the name of artist', as well as places such as Covent Garden that were either closed or bombed-out. It asked 'Is Sadler's Wells to receive no encouragement while it alone is providing opera and ballet on a generous scale and of high artistic excellence to a not ungrateful public?'¹³⁴ Despite elsewhere endorsing the social concessions forced upon the establishment by war, The Times was willing to maintain the exclusivity of the realm of culture and its rituals.

CEMA's indignant answer was that it sought 'to bring the enjoyment of the arts ... to as many people as may be; not ... to a few selected centres'.¹³⁵ Its consistent justification in these terms revealed that it had a different concept of who constituted 'the public'. Its appeal was to 'the man in the streets of Walsall and Wigan, and Warrington and Widnes, not Bath and Bournemouth, Malvern and Glyndebourne'.¹³⁶ It is this position that locates its democratic perspective on the idea of culture as a highly conscious and astute contribution to the construction of a 'people's war'. The Pilgrim Trust's Macmillan, an elderly Scottish lawyer, had been appointed the Minister of Information when most expected the post to go to Sir John Reith, now *ex*-BBC yet a more obvious choice for the role.¹³⁷ Macmillan's lack of expertise or awareness of the modern media might account for his willingness to invest his ideas in CEMA and its more traditional equipment; and from the outset he was keen to exploit its potential as an organ of propaganda. While it was a pragmatic move to encourage the Government to claim credit for CEMA with financial support Macmillan insisted that:

¹³⁴ 'Music and the Arts', The Times, 15 June 1940, p. 7.

¹³⁵ CEMA: 'Letter: 'Music and The Arts: Use of Treasury Grant'', The Times, 17 June 1940, p. 4. Sentiments also endorsed (in answer to The Times) in CEMA Bulletin, No.3, July 1940, p. 1

¹³⁶ Dr. Tom Jones, 'The Origins of C.E.M.A.', CEMA Bulletin, No.25, May 1942, p. 2.

It is of practical importance to show publicly and unmistakably that the Government cares about the cultural life of the country. This country is supposed to be fighting for civilization and democracy and if these things mean anything they mean a way of life where people have liberty and opportunity to pursue the things of peace. It should be part of a national war policy to show that the Government is actively interested in these things. Such an assurance needs to be given equally for the sake of our own people and for the sake of British prestige abroad.¹³⁸

In 1941 and in much the same vein, Kenneth Clark recommended that propaganda should emphasise the difference between British and German attitudes towards culture. In the Great War 'all the best elements of German culture and science were still in Germany and were supporting the German cause, whereas now they are outside Germany and supporting us'.¹³⁹

However, if culture and its proponents were the indices of humanity and democracy, then Britain itself was faced with an embarrassing dilemma. This was well-understood by CEMA's committee members and conveyed in its 'educational' approach. Any suggestion they were directed by fears of 'an almost complete artistic blackout for a large segment of the British people' ignores the fact that the majority had either no interest in, or even access to, 'cultural' activities.¹⁴⁰ CEMA's *raison d'être* was based upon stressing 'the urgency under war conditions of maintaining the permanent values of peace', yet the permanent values had been those of the

¹³⁷ See: Nicholas Pronay, 'The News Media at War' in Nicholas Pronay and D.W. Spring (eds), *Propaganda, Politics and Film, 1918-45*, Macmillan, London, 1982, pp. 177-183.

¹³⁸ EL1/2. 'Notes on Policy and Structure of C.E.M.A', no date, probably January 1940, p. 2.

¹³⁹ Quoted in Ian McLaine, *Ministry of Morale: Home Front Morale and the Ministry of Information*

few.¹⁴¹ Davies, for instance, cites a League of Audiences survey of 1939 that revealed that 92 per cent of the population of Britain had never been to the theatre!¹⁴² When the companies of The Old Vic and Sadler's Wells were mobilised by CEMA and went on the road to play to munitions workers and miners in South Wales, Lancashire and Durham, they found that only two per cent of audiences in those areas had ever seen a live stage play. As Keynes reflected in 1945, 'At the start our aim was to replace what war had taken away; but we soon found that we were providing what had never existed even in peace time'.¹⁴³

As war got underway, Sir Charles Trevelyan, former Labour Minister of Education wrote privately that 'I have a deep-seated feeling that none of the people want to fight and that the war will collapse'.¹⁴⁴ His comment was prompted by a feeling that the deep social divisions of British society and the privations endured by many, especially during the previous decade, meant that the majority might not have any investment in the 'common' goals and values in need of defending. This is a suggestive context for understanding CEMA's significance and particularly populist approach in advertising culture as something commonly owned: a *people's* culture. Yet in no sense would it be possible to suggest that it proceeded with anything like a

in *World War II*, Allen and Unwin, London, 1979, p. 156.

¹⁴⁰ As in Harris, *Government Patronage of the Arts in Great Britain*, p. 25.

¹⁴¹ *CEMA Bulletin*, No.1, May 1940, p. 1.

¹⁴² Davies, *Other Theatres*, p. 136 This is all the more remarkable when considered in the light of Pick's observation that: 'The scale of arts activity in pre-war Britain has been consistently belittled by the post-war Arts Council. It is interesting to look at some figures. There were for example 530 museums in Britain in 1928, and by 1938 more than 650 museums and art galleries. The *Statistical Review* of 1938 suggests that between 1933 and 1938 artists in Britain earned on average £2.5m in commissions from industry, and the last pre-war census of 1931 gave a figure of 10,000 visual artists working in Britain, considerably more than in recent accounts. There were more than 120 major touring theatres in Britain in the thirties, 650 other theatres, and more than forty repertory theatres'. Pick, *Vile Jelly*, p. 115.

¹⁴³ Keynes, 'The Arts Council: its Policy and Hopes', p. 31.

¹⁴⁴ Quoted in Curran and Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility*, p. 152.

conceptualisation of working-class culture as a discrete or reputable category. The assumption was that those whom it visited were *without* culture. 'An essential part of the plan' was to give concerts in 'drab industrial areas ... sending exhibitions of original paintings to minor villages and suburbs which have, as yet no cultural roots ... where only the cinema is available'.¹⁴⁵ Speaking of the initial forays of the London Philharmonic and Symphony Orchestras, it was agreed that these should not be in the larger towns where cultural facilities were available, 'but rather the more isolated industrial places, which are ordinarily difficult of access, and expanding housing estates which are so far without centre or tradition'.¹⁴⁶ The lectures and talks that appended concerts or exhibitions indicated the pedagogical aim and desire to fashion an enlightened audience from "raw material".¹⁴⁷ There was an avowed aspiration 'to awaken in the people of this country a consciousness of their national heritage of art, through which they may find the comfort and inspiration they need'.¹⁴⁸

In spite of CEMA's educational missionary intent, its approach and ethos strike me as somewhat different from the traditional 'colonialism' of the Arnoldian view of a 'common culture'. Contrasted with the paternalism that directed the Pilgrim Trust in the Thirties, with its application of culture as remedy for working-class fecklessness, CEMA sought 'a sharp separation' of its work 'from association with unemployment'.¹⁴⁹ Of course, in theory everyone now had gainful employment, but it proceeded in a much more considerate manner. There was 'no wish to foist

¹⁴⁵ EL1/2. 'Notes on Policy and Structure of C.E.M.A.', p. 1.

¹⁴⁶ EL1/3. 'Minutes of CEMA. Second meeting, 18 January 1940', p. 2.

¹⁴⁷ CEMA Bulletin, No.17, September, 1941, p. 1.

¹⁴⁸ Pilgrim Trust: Ninth Annual Report, 1939, p. 39.

“ready-made” culture on a passive community; nothing happens except in response to demand and with the added impetus of social interest and effort’.¹⁵⁰ One CEMA correspondent noted that the lack of didacticism at concerts which served to underline its propaganda value. There was no evidence of ‘intervention’ by the Government regarding what selections were made, no prescription of ‘proper-stuff’, no barriers to enjoyment or inclusiveness and no jingoism. It was noted in fact that choices of German music were especially prevalent at concerts. The Government had missed the chance to express itself and ‘the entire enterprise was the essence of freedom’.¹⁵¹

Much of what was done was consciously *of* the people, with an emphasis on participation: ‘the enjoyment of the arts is closely linked with their practice’.¹⁵² It was an important ‘part of the plan’ to encourage music-making and play-acting ‘by the people themselves’, inculcating a sense of investment in the cultural heritage and its pursuit.¹⁵³ Populist credentials were established with the organisation of a series of ‘People’s Concerts’ in conjunction with National Federation of Music Societies: ‘the idea is to create big democratic festivals of music in the great industrial towns’.¹⁵⁴ And all of these initiatives accorded with the philosophies of the key Council members. Composer Walford Davies as ‘a leader and exponent of Everyman’s music’ offered ‘Music for the People’.¹⁵⁵ He was devoted to the amateur ideal, expressing his desire for “joy in the widest commonality spread”, a

¹⁴⁹ EL/1. ‘Memo for Informal Conference’, p. 2.

¹⁵⁰ Pilgrim Trust: Ninth Annual Report, 1939, p. 38.

¹⁵¹ CEMA Bulletin, No.22, February 1942, p. 1.

¹⁵² Pilgrim Trust: Ninth Annual Report, 1939, p. 38.

¹⁵³ EL1/2. ‘Notes on Policy and Structure of C.E.M.A.’, p. 1.

¹⁵⁴ CEMA Bulletin, No. 5. September 1940. p. 1 (My emphasis).

¹⁵⁵ Pilgrim Trust: Tenth Annual Report, 1940, p. 30.

democratic ideal expressing the main outlook of C.E.M.A. in all the arts'.¹⁵⁶ Administrator Tom Jones self-consciously inhabited the role of the 'ordinary man' at the Council, operating as a gauge of its accessibility: 'My value among the experts was that I heard music, felt drama, and looked at pictures, with the untutored organs of the man in the street'.¹⁵⁷ Although conceived before the war, the touring exhibition 'Arts for the People' was exploited in the spirit of CEMA. Its creator W.E. Williams was typical of those who formulated its philosophy and impelled its mission. Steele suggests that from his base in adult education, Williams exercised an enormous influence over the direction of a variety of cultural debates.¹⁵⁸ He had been the editor of the WEA journal the Highway during the 1930s and 1940s, maintaining it as 'as model of radical cultural exchange'.¹⁵⁹ A scholarship boy from humble Welsh roots, he became a tutor in the University of London Extra-Mural Department (1928-34) and later Secretary of the British Institute of Adult Education (1934-40). Most importantly perhaps, he was founder and Director of the Army Bureau of Current Affairs (ABCA).

ABCA was established by the War Office in 1941 as a result of alarming reports of low morale among the forces.¹⁶⁰ While ENSA provided diversions of a more familiar kind, ABCA dealt with more weighty and worldly issues through the circulation of educational pamphlets and the provision of lectures.¹⁶¹ Despite the fact

¹⁵⁶ Pilgrim Trust: Tenth Annual Report, 1940, p. 31.

¹⁵⁷ Jones, 'The Origins of C.E.M.A.', p. 2.

¹⁵⁸ Steele, The Emergence of Cultural Studies, p. 73.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p.72.

¹⁶⁰ For an overview of ABCA see also Fielding, Thompson and Tiratsoo, "England arise!": The Labour Party and Popular Politics in 1940s Britain, pp.27-30. For an insider's account, see Richard Hoggart, A Sort of Clowning: Life and Times Vol 11, 1940-59, Chatto and Windus, London, 1990, p. 61 ff.

¹⁶¹ See the account of its director Basil Dean, The Theatre at War.

that these were delivered by officers, or under their supervision, ABCA provided fertile ground for discussion of issues pertaining to why the war was being fought. As a consequence it anticipated the way in which peace itself might be won: 'We are fighting not to win, but to win *something* ... the world we want after the war'.¹⁶² By winter 1943-4 over 110,000 courses and lectures had taken place; so successful were they in generating radical discussion that Churchill himself tried to have them halted.¹⁶³

In the tradition of working-class adult education this atmosphere also provided soldiers with their first 'cultural' encounters. Initiated by Williams and operated by Allen Lane's Penguin Books, the Forces Book Club was established in 1942.¹⁶⁴ Many enlisted men performed play readings with books provided or developed amateur theatrical companies. By July 1943 there were 280 such groups affiliated to the umbrella of the amateur organisation the British Drama League and, as Andrew Davies has commented, there was a preference for socially relevant material in keeping with that presented in ABCA discussion groups. Light West End comedies were ousted in favour of 'more serious productions: the Army Education Syllabus actually recommended Odets' *Waiting for Lefty* and some O'Casey plays as suitable material'.¹⁶⁵

Exploiting this enthusiasm the ABCA Play Unit was established in June 1944 in order to dramatise the topics and ideas discussed in its lectures and

¹⁶² Army Bureau of Current Affairs, *Current Affairs*, No.28, 10 October 1942, quoted in Robert Hewison, *Culture and Consensus: England, Art and Politics Since 1940*, Methuen, London, 1997, p. 26.

¹⁶³ See Paul Addison, *The Road to 1945: British Politics and the Second World War*, Quartet, London, 1977, p. 151.

¹⁶⁴ See Nicholas Joicey, 'A Paperback Guide to Progress: Penguin Books 1935-c.1951', *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol.4, No.1, 1993, pp. 25-56.

pamphlets. Like Jack Lindsay, many of the individuals recruited had been active during the years of the 'Popular Front', often in alternative theatre and they helped build on the communal and educative spirit of that tradition in ABCA work. A notable way in which this was achieved was through the living newspaper, a populist form of theatre that came to be associated with grassroots democratic causes. It was pioneered in post-revolutionary Russia as a means of spreading the Bolshevik message to a largely illiterate population. The form was also enlisted as a tool in New Deal America by Elmer Rice and those involved in the Workers' Theater Project. Encouraging democratic participation and the desire for social change, productions such as Triple A Plowed Under (1935) and Power (1937) avowed 'to educate, agitate and reform'.¹⁶⁶ Typically, these plays provided insights into contemporary issues of the day, the former dealing with landownership and related inequalities. A resume of events was presented, or a portrait of how the world was organised or particular situations came to be, offering a number of commentaries and possible solutions and usually suggesting one radical remedy as the most effective. In pre-war Britain the form was adapted by radical companies such as 'Unity Theatre' in London and Miller and Littlewood's 'Theatre of Action' in Manchester. Both companies dramatised the events of Munich and the issue of appeasement in productions of Last Edition, the latter's 1938-9 run falling foul of

¹⁶⁵ Davies, Other Theatres, p. 131.

¹⁶⁶ D.Keith Peacock, Radical Stages: Alternative History in Modern British Drama, Greenwood Press, New York, Westport Connecticut and London, 1991, p. 38. See also: Arthur Arent, 'The Techniques of the Living Newspaper' (1938), Theatre Quarterly, Vol.1, No.4, October-December 1971, pp. 57-59; Paul Sporn, Against Itself: The Federal Theater and Writers' Projects in the Mid-West, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1995 and George Kazacoff, Dangerous Theatre: The Federal Theatre Project As a Forum for New Plays, Peter Lang, New York, 1989.

the Lord Chamberlain's office with Miller and Littlewood bound over to keep the peace as a result of a police raid and their subsequent prosecution.¹⁶⁷

Despite W.E. Williams involvement in ABCA, there is little record of any direct contact between CEMA and the specific, intentionally radical cultural work and organisations that took the opportunity to comment on the war or British society. CEMA certainly had little say about the content of the material it provided and what was performed was standard canonic fare: classical music and painting with drama centering on Shakespeare, Shaw, Eliot, Gilbert and Sullivan etc. A director of drama called Michael Owen had been one of the pioneers of the living newspaper format in ABCA but in the lists of events in the CEMA Bulletin there is a lone revue in Rugby suggestively entitled 'Baa Baa Blackshirt' with music by William Walton.¹⁶⁸ 'Compass Players', a dramatic company under the direction of one Maurice Browne, provided something in the radical vein with its interpretation of R.H.Ward's The Secret Life, a comedy built around a flooded country estate and the relations of its imperilled owners and their employees. Its 1944 production became something less light-hearted, presented as social commentary in the way that it accentuated tensions between rich, selfish landowners and workers. Seemingly unaware of the WTM tradition and the work of the various Unity theatre groups, company member Leslie Hardie recalls it as a production that broke new ground, presenting a world beyond the rarefied middle-class domain of drawing-room comedy, provided working-class characters who were both seriously drawn and

¹⁶⁷ A transcript of the play is included in Goorney and MacColl, Agit-prop to Theatre Workshop.

¹⁶⁸ CEMA Bulletin, No. 13, May 1941, p. 4.

articulate. This 'wholly dramatic clash of personality, class and generation', was one that drew appreciative cheers from miners in South Wales and forces audiences.¹⁶⁹

Despite its democratic zeal, and as John Harris suggests, a major anxiety for CEMA related to the idea of 'spoonfeeding' audiences.¹⁷⁰ They were felt to be untutored, suspicious, difficult *and* easy to please due to the conditions of the war. Yet, as mentioned, many operatives went about their work in good faith, their open-mindedness and lack of prejudice underwrote CEMA's democratic aims. Work set before audiences could be quite new to them and was thus demanding, but it was presented without condescension. A midnight concert in May 1940 at the Birmingham Small Arms Factory was thought bold for its inclusion of a piece by Stravinsky, but 'There was no doubt about the warmth of the reception'.¹⁷¹ Those who expressed doubts about the kinds of audiences found in such venues often faced a challenge to their preconceptions. Helen Anderson wrote to HQ of one factory tour with two musicians called Henry Wendon and Edward Silverman that they had not been 'sympathetic partners': 'Wendon ... was convinced the factories would not want good stuff, but actually he was continuously being asked for operatic arias, which he was very loath to do, however we managed to squeeze one or two out of him!'¹⁷²

CEMA's classically trained actors, musicians and artists were the latest in that long line of intrepid explorers to encounter 'slum people'.¹⁷³ Venturing into an

¹⁶⁹ Leslie Hardie quoted in Pamela Dellar (compiler, ed.), Plays Without Theatres: Recollections of the Compass Players Travelling Theatre 1944-1952, Highgate Publications, Beverley, 1989, p. 10.

¹⁷⁰ John Harris, Government Patronage of the Arts in Great Britain, p. 33.

¹⁷¹ CEMA Bulletin, No.1, May 1940, p. 6.

¹⁷² EL2/43. Helen Anderson, Letter: 19 July 1941, to CEMA.

¹⁷³ EL 2/45. 'Correspondence and Reports from Music Traveller, Southern/Eastern Region: Mr. R Biggs': 'Report of Work', 2 January 1941.

England they had previously barely noticed or considered, they performed 'Sometimes in the dark, in underground vaults, in an evil-smelling atmosphere, always in an improvised "hall" with an old cheap piano or none at all ... They find their way to, obscure slums and suburbs often at night through bombs and barrage'.¹⁷⁴ Anderson's experience was typical, as throughout 1941 she motored around the North-East to 'pretty grim and cheerless spots', 'dismal Durham Mining Villages' and isolated colliery towns such as Linton and North-Seaton, 'the drabest village I have yet seen; it seems to be one endless series of backyards'.¹⁷⁵ After a tour of munitions factories an actor called Walter Hudd related how audiences were comprised mostly of 'girls', 'who before the war were employed perhaps at home, or in shops and offices, and are now engaged upon tedious and often perilous work vital to our war effort'. In the circumstances such people were to be appreciated, understood and often delighted in for the way in which their humanity and receptivity did take CEMA's people by surprise. Hudd's audiences were drawn 'almost entirely from the working class, and are, therefore, from the point of view of the actor, rather special, completely unsophisticated audiences, unaffected by convention or theatrical prejudice - and, I may add, wonderful to play to'.¹⁷⁶

The classical pianist Pouishnoff did a two-week tour of the mining and industrial districts of Yorkshire 'and he said it was one of the most interesting and happy experiences of his life making such personal contact with entirely new audiences'.¹⁷⁷ The secretary of the London Philharmonic Orchestra wrote of one

¹⁷⁴ CEMA Bulletin, No.6. October 1940, p. 1.

¹⁷⁵ EL2/43, Anderson, 'Report of Work', 14, 28 May and 23 December 1941.

¹⁷⁶ Walter Hudd, 'New Audiences for Old', CEMA Bulletin, No.45, January 1944, p. 2.

¹⁷⁷ EL2/43, Anderson, Letter: 21 October 1941 to Irene Scharrer.

successful trip to Kettering, that 'During the evening I met two members of the audience, both young working-class men who displayed the greatest enthusiasm over the visit of the orchestra ... Had no-one else attended the concert, this would have justified the performance'.¹⁷⁸ Similarly, the Curator of Brighton Art Gallery, remarked on the nature of those attending a CEMA exhibition after a night of some particularly bad bombing. He overheard a group of people talking in hushed, conspiratorial tones, arrested by their 'passionate intensity' of their voices and deeply serious fervour, 'which made me realise that art really does mean something tremendously important to what are sometimes called the "common people". A single incident like that gives one faith enough to carry on with one's work for years'.¹⁷⁹

In this interpretation of CEMA's wartime contribution it would be possible to over-emphasise its innovative democratic qualities at the expense of an indisputable and ultimately inescapable conservatism. Often, its culturalism conveyed a backwards-looking organicism. In fact, the very practicalities and *physical* effort of diffusing culture during wartime itself evoked a pre-industrial England. The Music Travellers were the evocation of 'a dream of fair women singing their way through the villages of England until all the birds and all the shires joined the choir and filled the land with melody'.¹⁸⁰ The vision of a unified, organic common culture was one firmly planted in an Arcadian past, a central feature of the ethos of those such as Walford Davies, that 'Britain used to be a land where song and melody were natural and general. That happy tradition was broken. The people

¹⁷⁸ CEMA Bulletin, No.3, July 1940, p. 2.

¹⁷⁹ CEMA Bulletin, No.7, November 1940, p. 7.

in many places lost their songs, their ear, their readiness for the making of plays and music as the expression and the ornament of ordinary life'.¹⁸¹ Lord De La Warr too was prompted by 'Venetian visions of a post-war Lord Mayor's Show on the Thames in which the Board of Education led the Arts in triumph from Whitehall to Greenwich in magnificent barges and gorgeous gondolas; orchestras, madrigal singers, Shakespeare from the old Vic, ballet from Sadlers' Wells, shining canvases from the Royal Academy, folk dancers from village greens - in fact Merrie England'.¹⁸²

To a degree this imaginary accords with that of 'Deep England'. Resonating in wartime propaganda, this was 'an image of the national heartland constructed as much out of folk memories, poetry and cultural associations as actuality'.¹⁸³ Robert Hewison argues that this imagined pastoral landscape had a compensatory value, contrasting with the realities of bombing and wartime stresses. Yet there is something more to this idea in its mobilisation by CEMA. The war might have been against Germany but the nature of its missionary intent indicated another equally pernicious and familiar foe. Davies writes that the Music Travellers were advised to keep things simple, 'and not to annoy the irretrievably debased taste of listeners conditioned to jazz and film music'.¹⁸⁴ Yet this seems contrary to the intent of maintaining standards and the manner in which these very people consciously sought to counter such tastes. After hearing that Jarrow had been depressed for so long that its inhabitants had lost their enthusiasm for anything at all, Helen Anderson

¹⁸⁰ Jones, 'The Origins of C.E.M.A.', p. 4.

¹⁸¹ CEMA Bulletin, No.12, April 1941, p. 1.

¹⁸² Jones, 'The Origins of C.E.M.A.', p. 2.

¹⁸³ Hewison, Culture and Consensus, p. 23. See also, Williams, British Writers and the Media, p. 206.

wrote that: 'at any rate they are reputed not to like jazz, so perhaps there's some hope for C.E.M.A. there'.¹⁸⁵ In anticipation of a trip to Bishop Auckland she spent her time 'Practising and thinking out what to say to Girls Club to make them like anything other than "swing"'.¹⁸⁶ Overall, interaction with audiences and the desire to generate activity can be counterpoised with the contemporary fears of passive diversions of radio and cinema, broadcast to the home or in the dark to relatively anonymous audiences.

Often then, the ideas and actions of CEMA echoed so many cultural pessimists with their resolutely anti-modern outlook. It sent its missionaries to those places blighted by industrialism but it included those newer locations that seemed to herald a downward step in the direction of 'mass' civilization. The newer suburbs especially had been identified by Priestley as a 'New Britain'. For Orwell, they were evidence of 'a civilization in which children grow up with an intimate knowledge of magnetoes and in complete ignorance of the Bible'.¹⁸⁷ For Leavis they were the physical manifestation of a decline in the values and spirit of fine living, 'In their wanton and indifferent ugliness, their utter insensitiveness to humanity and the environment, the towns, suburbs and houses of modern England are unparalleled in history'.¹⁸⁸

Ultimately, the radical implications of CEMA's work came as a consequence of the encounter between artists and new audiences in new situations, positing

¹⁸⁴ Davies, *Other Theatres*, p. 126.

¹⁸⁵ EL2/43, Anderson, 'Report of Work', 3 March 1941.

¹⁸⁶ EL2/43, Anderson, 'Report of Work', 27 December 1941.

¹⁸⁷ George Orwell, 'Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius' (1941) in *The Complete George Orwell Volume 12: A Patriot at Last, 1939-41*, Secker and Warburg, London, 1998, p. 408.

¹⁸⁸ F.R. Leavis, *Culture and Environment*, p. 93.

challenges to the traditional rituals of art and questioning the barriers between creator and public. For some, there was a mutual learning process that would lead to the retention of shared values: 'I only hope that they get from us one iota of what we learn from them and that the friendly contact will be sealed for life and be one of the strong links in the new conditions'.¹⁸⁹ A production of the 'The Christmas Story' for a Canadian Regiment at St. Martin's in the Field involved a couple of professionals and a cast recruited locally: 'there was little distinction between the audience and players ... They play quite simply. The audience attends, enjoys and assists. The result is a true company of people, not just a company of actors and an audience separated by an orchestra'.¹⁹⁰ In an acknowledgment of the significance of this kind of conclusion, Hudd too wrote of the end of the customary separation of actor and audience, 'and there is the fullest scope for discussion about the play between the people who performed it and those who saw it. This discussion is not yet on an organised basis, but the opportunity is there for the personal exchange of ideas. However contrary it may be to the established tradition, in my view it is no bad thing, as this closer and more intimate contact can teach the actor a more comprehensive view of life'.¹⁹¹

There is no conspiracy to write of here, but this kind of utopian rhetoric that was attendant upon CEMA's approach met with suspicion and rejection by the more trenchant 'men of culture'. Hudd himself took to task a 'well-known critic' who had broadcast a critique of CEMA and the idea of bringing Shaw and Shakespeare to 'the masses', and 'spoke of this venture as trying an audience of industrial workers

¹⁸⁹ CEMA Bulletin, No.11, March 1941, p. 1.

¹⁹⁰ CEMA Bulletin, No.21, January 1942, p. 1.

too high'.¹⁹² One representative of the Royal Academy complained of 'the poor quality and debasing effect of the pictorial art' of its exhibitions, suggesting that it be confined to musical and dramatic activities.¹⁹³ One oft-repeated story related how audiences who were new to theatrical performance 'treated the stage like the cinema, and talked, walked about, drank tea'.¹⁹⁴ The origins of this anecdote are obscure, but it accorded with the implication that beyond its familiar and proper locations, and stripped of its attendant rituals, the essence of culture was itself removed. As Rebellato argues, for a certain intellectual body of opinion the prestige of art 'was incompatible with helping amateurs in the West Midlands and serving towns and the industrial villages of the North-East'.¹⁹⁵

Ultimately, the egalitarian ethos of CEMA offered by those who created it and many of those involved in its work was gradually tempered in favour of the traditional cultural élitism that was always present. This development was itself a consequence of CEMA's success and consolidated by its incorporation within the State as an official body. In 1942 R.A. Butler of the Board of Education announced that it was to be granted a considerable budget of £100,000 from the Treasury. Its work done, the Pilgrim Trust and its seconded officials bowed out from the Council. Replacing Macmillan, John Maynard Keynes assumed the mantle of 'a State Maecenas'. As Butler asked 'who could better carry forward the work of the Council

¹⁹¹ Hudd, 'New Audiences for Old', p. 3.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ Capt. Alan Graham, 15 February 1944, Parliamentary Debates: Fifth Series: Vol 397. House of Commons Official Reports, HMSO, London, 1944, cols. 27-8.

¹⁹⁴ As repeated by Patricia Hollis, Jennie Lee: A Life, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1997, p. 247.

¹⁹⁵ Dan Rebellato, 1956 and All That, p. 41.

in spreading abroad an interest in art, by circulating art exhibitions, in music, whether by concerts in halls and factories, or in stimulating an interest in drama?'¹⁹⁶

Keynes, a key member of the Bloomsbury Group of artists and aesthetes, had already confessed a 'limited sympathy with the principles' upon which CEMA had been managed, and there is good reason for pinpointing him as the key figure who undermined its democratic potential.¹⁹⁷ His cultural philosophy had much in common with Arnold and Leavis; before the war he had protested at the way in which 'the divine gift' of the public entertainer was exploited, and destroyed through its prostitution in the interest of financial gain, 'one of the worser crimes of present-day capitalism'.¹⁹⁸ In his 1945 broadcast to the nation on the founding of the Arts Council he underlined the romantic concept of the artist and his (sic) work as self-evident and consensual, 'of its nature, individual and free, undisciplined, unregimented, uncontrolled. The artist walks where the breath of the spirit blows him. He cannot be told his direction; he does not know it himself'.¹⁹⁹ CEMA was by no stretch of the imagination prescriptive in its approach to 'the Arts' (in the sense of how it was perceived to be managed under totalitarian regimes), but Keynes shied away from any attempt to define the social function of the artist in a less commercial manner. Leventhal has demonstrated his imperiousness in manouvering CEMA towards a focus upon High Culture. He was wary of projects such as 'Art for the People', educational lectures about art, and, in his disdain for amateur activity, anything which detracted from the mystique of the arts, taste and especially the role

¹⁹⁶ R.A. Butler, Board of Education, 16 June 1941, Parliamentary Debates: Fifth Series: Vol 380. House of Commons Official Reports, HMSO, London, col. 1404.

¹⁹⁷ Quoted in Leventhal, "The Best for the Most", p. 105.

¹⁹⁸ John Maynard Keynes, 'Art and the State', Listener, 26 August 1936, Vol. XVI, No.398, p. 372.

of the professional artist and critic. For instance, he observed that CEMA had 'shown up' the deplorable lack of Arts buildings available in the country yet if anything, it had proved itself able to do things quite ably without such necessities.²⁰⁰

Many in CEMA did proceed with the intention of making the kind of work that they did a permanent contribution to the society people looked forward to after the war. One operative wrote that whatever occurred, 'one thing we do know, and that is that we shall soon rise again and bloom out of the debris'.²⁰¹ Its importance lies in its contribution to a rarely considered adjunct to the establishment of Welfare State ideals, whether adequately realised or not. At the end of the war the Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Education (also a member of the CEMA board) underlined the ethos that the arts were an indispensable part of 'everyday life', adding that they were 'for every section of the community'.²⁰² Likewise, and for all of those qualities that he rejected, Keynes did endorse the notion that the theatre and gallery were something that should form 'a living element in everyone's upbringing'. Indeed there was a vestigial hint of CEMA's democratic energy and Arcadian impulse when he warned of the damage done by 'the excessive prestige of metropolitan standards and fashions. Let every part of Merry England be merry in its own way'.²⁰³ When Labour won its resounding victory in 1945, many who felt that questions of leisure and the arts were integral to the building of socialism had a successful model to build upon.²⁰⁴ As one correspondent to Tribune wrote: 'the time

¹⁹⁹ Keynes, 'The Arts Council: its Policy and Hopes', pp. 31-2.

²⁰⁰ E.g., in CEMA Bulletin, No.55, November 1944.

²⁰¹ Quoted in Pilgrim Trust: Tenth Annual Report, 1940, p. 38.

²⁰² Mrs T. Cazalet-Keir, 11 June 1945, Parliamentary Debates: Fifth Series: Volume 411, HMSO, London, col. 1373.

²⁰³ Keynes, 'The Arts Council: its Policy and Hopes', p. 32.

²⁰⁴ For an account see: Fielding, Thompson and Tiratsoo, "England arise!": The Labour Party and

has now arrived when culture should cease to be the hall-mark of the leisured class and should be available to all'.²⁰⁵ Although the writer J.B. Priestley suspected that for 'the makers of our Socialist State' the arts were but 'icing on a cake', he recommended their general 'creation and appreciation' as a means to achieving 'a community in which every citizen felt himself to be something of an artist and every artist knew himself to be a citizen'.²⁰⁶

Ultimately, definitions of what culture was, its social role and who possessed it continued to be a highly productive arena for debate and activity. Keynes ended his remarks on CEMA and the newly established Arts Council with a rallying cry of 'Death to Hollywood!' a sentiment that echoed the position of many of those to the left and right, conservative and progressive. While the Arts Council provided one élitist bulwark against the inauthenticities of Modernity it fell to those of a more radical persuasion to explore the question of working-class culture, and its expression, seeking to install it as a vital component in the realisation of the 'Age of the Common Man'.

Popular Politics in 1940s Britain, pp. 135-68.

²⁰⁵ Tribune, 24 August 1945, quoted in Ibid, p.137.

²⁰⁶ J.B. Priestley, The Arts Under Socialism: Being a Lecture Given to the Fabian Society with a Postscript on: What the Government Should do for the Arts Here and Now, Turnstile Press, London, 1947, p. 22.

Chapter Two.

The Fantasy of the Lower Classes:

The Post-War Folk Revival and the Politics of Culture.

Although its roots can be traced to the Romantic period, the historiography of the Folk Revival distinguishes between two eras.¹ The first is associated with the work of Cecil Sharp and the founding of the Folk Song Society, the English Folk Dance Society in 1912-13, and their amalgamation in 1932 as the English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS). The dominance of the EFDSS, impelling and overseeing the collecting of songs and dances, and in generating ideas about folk, continued until the Second World War. The ethos of a second Revival was formulated in this period of transition and, although indebted to it, it was largely independent of the Society.

In an early reflection on the democratic potential of the post-war Revival, Fred (alias Karl) Dallas, sometimes folk correspondent for the Daily Worker and Melody Maker, identified its origins. It could be located amongst a number of obvious progressive trends such as the Labour victory and the growth of membership of the Communist Party.² Equally important was the influence of the reformed education system and its potential for the formation of a truly egalitarian society.

¹ The romantic roots of the practices of folk collecting are embodied in work such as Thomas Percy's (1729-1811) Reliques of Ancient English Poetry, a collection of popular ballads, songs and sonnets published in 1765, as well as that of Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832), particularly his interest in Border tales and ballads. Francis Child's (1825-96) five volume English and Scottish Popular Ballads, was published between 1882 and 1898, the year in which the Folk Song Society was established.

² Fred Dallas, 'The Use of Folk Music in a Mass Musical Movement', Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Vol.11, No.1, 1963, pp. 56-66.

This context has begun to be explored in recent histories of the post-war Revival with varying degrees of success.³ Similarly, broader cultural and social histories have in turn acknowledged the Revival as integral to that era, to the reformulation of the politics of class and attempts to broaden the scope of what counted as culture.⁴ While I seek to emphasise that the Revival was a significant historical event, the object here is to provide more than a contribution to its social history, focussing instead upon its foundational assumptions. Concerned as it has been with ideas of working class, or folk culture (whether the two are the same thing is a key issue here), the Revival offers a useful paradigm for discussing the elements of an aesthetics of class.

In turn, folk discourses illuminate aspects of historiography. The Revival pre-empted and connected with the development of both the oral and 'people's' history movements. Some of the more interesting work on folk music formed part of the early editions of History Workshop Journal. Most famously, songs, ballads and broadsides themselves provided a rich source of evidence for the defining work of post-war British historiography, E.P. Thompson's The Making of the English

³ See Niall MacKinnon, The British Folk Scene: Musical Performance and Social Identity, Open University Press, Buckingham and Philadelphia, 1993; Georgina Boyes, The Imagined Village: Culture, Ideology and the English Folk Revival, Manchester University Press, Manchester and New York, 1993; Gerald Porter, 'The World's Ill-divided' in Andy Croft (ed.), A Weapon in the Struggle: A Cultural History of the Communist Party in Britain, Pluto Press, London, 1998, pp. 171-91; Mike Brocken, 'The British Folk Revival: An Analysis of Folk/popular Dichotomies from a Popular Music Studies Perspective', PhD., Liverpool University, 1997.

⁴ See, for instance: Raphael Samuel, 'History Workshop, 1966-80' in (ed.), Raphael Samuel, People's History and Socialist Theory, Routledge, London, 1981, p. 413 and Carolyn Steedman, 'State-Sponsored Autobiography' in (eds), Becky Conekin, Frank Mort and Chris Waters, Moments of Modernity: Reconstructing Britain 1945-1964, Rivers Oram Press, London and New York, 1999, p. 49.

Working-Class (1963). As one song collection has it, folk constitutes 'The Sound of History'.⁵

In light of this connection perhaps the most suggestive product of the historiography of the Revival is Georgina Boyes' The Imagined Village. She demonstrates the pervasiveness of ideas developed within the longer tradition of the English Folk Revival. From its earliest days the ideas of society, history and culture formulated by its participants have had a significant effect on wider commentary in the arts and on culture in general. Groups as diverse as Frank and Queenie Leavis (and their disciples) and the Communist lead Workers' Music Association (WMA) 'have based their entire approach to the aesthetics of popular culture on ideas of working-class creativity developed in the Folk Revival'.⁶

The enormous influence of Leavisite thinking on the British critical tradition has begun to be assessed, and this thesis offers a contribution to this assessment.⁷ However, there is more to be said than Boyes allows for, especially concerning the profound implications in her exploration of the discursive character of folk's epistemological categories. This is important for the way in which ideas generated by the WMA also intersected with the wider cultural tradition of the labour movement and a native Marxism as it developed after the war.⁸ As we saw in the previous chapter, the political problem of culture revolved around the palpable values and achievement of the bourgeoisie, highlighting a corresponding lack of

⁵ Roy Palmer, The Sound of History: Songs and Social Comment, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1988.

⁶ Boyes, The Imagined Village, p. 3.

⁷ Especially Denis Dworkin, Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain: History, the New Left and the Origins of Cultural Studies, Duke University Press, Durham NC; London, 1997.

⁸ On the relationship of the early folk Revival and the labour movement, see Duncan Hall "'A Pleasant Change From Politics": The Musical Culture of the British Labour Movement, 1918-1939',

achievement amongst the working class. Some forged 'proletarian' forms or theorised about the possibilities of a post-revolutionary culture, which was perforce *classless*. For others a model existed in folk music which provided a socialist artist's dream of a 'truly popular culture, a culture of and for the people'.⁹

Much of the historiography on the subject has been in sympathy with this idea, often highly invested in the politics and aesthetic debates of the folk scene itself. It indulges the very discourses that have informed it, seeking to answer questions about *who* exactly produced folk music, *where* and *when* it was produced as well as concerns about *what* counts as folk and exactly *whose* history it speaks to. Unable to 'to step outside of their chosen *genre* for long' however, commentators have sought to hold onto a disappearing object while mercilessly deconstructing it in search of absolute definitions, authentic texts, and 'correct' motives for collecting.¹⁰

As Simon Frith has commented, 'the history of folk music is a history of the struggle among folk collectors to claim folk meaning for themselves'.¹¹ Seeking properly 'proletarian' credentials, evaluative criteria brought to bear on folk music have included the investigation of the biography of creators and collectors as well as the vetting of the language of songs for 'bourgeois' ideas.¹² This approach has been repeated most recently by Mike Brocken. Echoing the idealism of those he seeks to

PhD., University of Warwick, 2001.

⁹ Frankie Armstrong and Brian Pearson, 'Some Reflections on the English Folk Revival', *History Workshop Journal*, No.7, Spring 1979, p. 95.

¹⁰ Brocken, 'The British folk revival', available at <http://web.ukonline.co.uk/mustrad/articles/foreward>, p. 5 (Visited 26 February 2001). See also MacKinnon, *The British Folk Scene*, and Dave Harker, *One for the Money: Politics and Popular Song*, Hutchinson, London, 1980.

¹¹ Simon Frith, 'Why Do Songs Have Words' in *Music For Pleasure*, Polity, Cambridge, 1988, p. 113.

¹² See Harker, *One for the Money* and his *Fakesong: The Manufacture of British Folksong 1700 to the Present Day*, Open University Press, Milton Keynes, 1985; Ian Watson. *Song and Democratic Culture in Britain: An Approach to Popular Culture in Social Movements*. Croom Helm, London and

critique, he relies upon assertions about the 'real' preferences and pleasures of 'the workers', arguing that folk music was something that 'had meaning foisted upon it'.¹³ Surely, the issue is not to establish whether ascriptions of 'authenticity and originality ... are rather fictional' but rather to understand *why* these claims were made and to what *ends*?¹⁴

If understood at all, these seem to me to be questions that have been inadequately or partially dealt with by the extant scholarship. In this context A.L. 'Bert' Lloyd's description of English folk song as 'the musical and poetic expression of the fantasy of the lower classes' (i.e. an articulation of class-consciousness), is highly suggestive for this aesthetics, if not in the manner in which it was intended. Seeking to celebrate the spontaneous, creative and radical aspects of grassroots activity, Gerald Porter has recently claimed that the Revival was not 'a self-conscious or factitious one' when it seems to me to have been that *exactly*.¹⁵ I argue that it was *highly* self-conscious and bound up in various formalities including a furious generation of scholarship that helped to define it and its relationship to the era in which it arose. Here, I shall explore how the discourse of folk has been based upon descriptions of a proper or genuine working-class psychology that is inevitably partial and prescriptive, and often suspiciously essentialist. This psychology is the result of guiding assumptions that have to do with an expose of the inauthentic, passive nature of 'mass' living. In opposition are the qualities exemplified by folk music: creativity, activity and an insistence upon the notion that it represents a

Canberra, 1983.

¹³ Brocken, 'Foreword', p. 9.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁵ Porter, 'The World's Ill-divided', p. 189.

tradition of radical resistance to the status quo. As Thompson advises, 'we must also remember the 'underground' of the ballad-singer and the fair-ground ... for in these ways the "inarticulate" conserved certain values - a spontaneity and capacity for enjoyment and mutual loyalties - despite the inhibiting pressures of magistrates, mill-owners, and methodists'.¹⁶

As Boyes has argued, the discourse of folk was founded upon middle-class concerns and priorities. Amongst its members the Folk-Song Society numbered individuals such as Lucy Broadwood, Percy Grainger, the Reverend Sabine Baring-Gould and Cecil Sharp. These collectors ventured out into the fields in order to record what they determined to be last vestiges of an organic culture. The recognition and salvaging of Folk was vital as it was identified as the embodiment of the 'essential' qualities of Englishness, and as such can be allied to the consolidation of the nation state and the age of Imperialism. Composer Ralph Vaughan Williams described a belief that 'in the fastnesses of rural England, was the well-spring of English music'.¹⁷ For Baring-Gould, a debt was owed by all to 'those old people' and the culture they carried with them, that 'if we have good in us, if we are scrupulous, honest, truthful, self-controlled, it comes to us ... along with our pure blood from honest ancestry'.¹⁸

The discourse of folk is understood also as a reaction to modernity and the fears and sense of loss that attended the social changes of the Industrial Revolution.

¹⁶ E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1979 (first published 1963), pp. 63-64.

¹⁷ Ralph Vaughan Williams, 'Cecil Sharp: An Appreciation' in Cecil Sharp, English Folk Song: Some Conclusions, Methuen, 1954, 3rd Edition, revised by Maud Karpeles (first published 1907), p. v.

¹⁸ Quoted in Martin J. Wiener, English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850-1980, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1992, p. 46.

The rural focus indicated the discrete boundary dividing 'the folk' - who had generated the music and dance - and the modern proletariat. The division was predicated on the feeling that the spread of industrialisation and democracy was 'marked by a tendency to despise and forget institutions which were characteristic of the preceding state of society'.¹⁹ Such analyses merely confirmed the degraded and empty quality of the lives of the working classes, divorced as they were from nature and encamped in the degenerative squalor of urban slums, contributing to the decline of 'the race'.

Dave Russell relates the practices of the Folk-Song Society to the kind of Victorian cultural philanthropy encountered in the last chapter. While Matthew Arnold's concept of 'sweetness and light' was embodied in literature, social reformers also sought to bring enlightenment to every corner of 'Darkest England' through the avenue of music. Despite an abiding tendency throughout the post-war Revival to characterise the project of the Victorian and Edwardian collectors as 'bourgeois' or reactionary, many 'were influenced by various levels of radical, and sometimes socialist, thought. They believed that by giving children supposedly uncontaminated products of rural culture they would help cleanse them from the impurity of city life'.²⁰

While at Cambridge during the 1880s, Cecil Sharp had been one of the organisers of a series of 'People's Concerts' and educational lectures conceived in this vein. A rather conservative and idiosyncratic Socialist, he became the main

¹⁹ W.D. Croft, 'Fifteen Years Progress', The Journal of the English Folk Dance Society, 2nd Series, No.1, 1927, p. 3.

²⁰ See Dave Russell, Popular Music in England, 1840-1914: A Social History, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1997, p. 53.

ideologue of the Revival, constructing theories about the meaning of folk music and its social utility. In his defining work English Folk Song: Some Conclusions (1907), he triumphantly announced that folk song had been put 'very prominently before the public' - mainly through the adoption of his ideas (and copyrighted collections – he collected over 5000 songs) by educationalists.²¹ That said, folk in its pre-war manifestation was never *truly* popular amongst the public at large. Its fortunes waxed and waned as Sharp broke away from the moribund FSS to form the English Dance Society before their pragmatic merger. In 1921 for instance, the Folk-Song Society registered only 250 subscribing members, although among them it numbered learned societies, universities and public libraries while Lord Tennyson was its President. Thus, the influence and reach of folk rested upon the position, sense of mission and tireless proselytising energy of its adherents. For Douglas Kennedy, later Director of the EFDSS, the members of the English Folk Dance Society were 'high-powered, artistic people, who were not only academic scholars but very musical also, believing in the fact that the collecting of English material for England was of vital importance'.²²

The self-appointed site of authority over folk song and dance, the EFDSS ploughed its 'Merrie' furrow throughout the inter-war years, its practices and assumptions unexamined. It was certainly unaffected by contemporary debates in the social sciences - amongst anthropologists for instance – and by the radical cultural politics of the 1930s. Ultimately, its hegemony came under attack as a result of the

²¹ Sharp, English Folk Song, p. xvii. See also, Board of Education, Suggestions for the Consideration of Teachers and Others Concerned in the Work of Public Education in Schools, HMSO, London, 1905, p. 70 ff.

²² Douglas Kennedy, interviewed in George Ewart Evans, Spoken History, Faber and Faber, London,

Second World War. A beneficiary of CEMA funding, the Society and its members were not untouched by *its* ethos and the progressive debates of that time. Questions began to be addressed concerning the coterie nature of the Society, and the glaring disparity between its membership - which was largely middle-class - and those who were felt to have comprised the 'folk' and their contemporary heirs. As Director Douglas Kennedy later commented, a major problem for his generation of enthusiasts was that they were taught to regard the 'folk' as a race apart.²³ Thus, at one wartime meeting, a member was well received when she expressed her hope that the Society 'would make renewed efforts to make singing and dancing understood and appreciated by working people'.²⁴

After the war, folk too had a part to play in various attempts to address the lineaments of national identity, class relations and cultural politics. As the Editor of the Society's journal acknowledged: 'Never has the word "folk" been made to serve so many purposes - political, commercial, educational, even religious - as now'.²⁵ Kennedy continuously stressed the Society's need to adapt to the demands of the new era.²⁶ In one rather incongruous move, a PR man was engaged in an attempt to boost its popularity. He told the membership that in order to fulfill their evangelical mission there was a need to adopt a 'less aesthetic and academic approach to the

1987, p. 223.

²³ See Douglas Kennedy, 'The Re-birth of Folk Music', English Dance and Song, Vol.XXI, No.2, November - December 1956, pp. 39-40.

²⁴ 'Minutes of the AGM', The English Folk Dance and Song Society Annual Report: 1943-1944, p. 12.

²⁵ 'The Editor', 'The World and the Parish', English Dance and Song, Vol.XXIV, No.3, December 1960, p. 75.

²⁶ See: Douglas Kennedy, 'Director's Report', The English Folk Dance and Song Society Annual Report: 1952-53, p. 17

public' - approaching them on 'their level'.²⁷ Aware of its clichéd and fuddy-duddy image, it was even suggested at one point that the Society drop the word 'folk' from its name!²⁸ Its publications gave generous space to new developments, even if its generally conservative membership could be less than receptive. Each time any innovation in folk song was mentioned, let alone praised, there would be a wealth of angry letters in protest.²⁹ Quite often in fact, the organisation continued unabated in its proprietary and idealistic view of what constituted proper folk music and expression. At times this could lead to the farcical scene of traditional singers being patronised with 'advice' about performance and technique by 'judges' at Society festivals and competitions.

This self-reflexive, ultimately self-interested approach on behalf of the EFDSS was also a reaction to the appearance of the highly popular scene that had arisen largely independent of its influence. This other Revivalist strand can be attributed to a number of important events including developments in technology, the modern media and changes in popular leisure practices. The long-running BBC series Country Magazine had made folk song a part of its wartime broadcasts and has been remembered as eliciting 'an unsuspected interest in traditional songs as early as 1942. When the programme returned to the subject in 1953, hundreds of texts were sent in by listeners in the countryside who claimed to have learned them

²⁷ See Hugh Rippon, 'The Yardstick That Matters is Sales' in English Dance and Song, Vol. XXV, No.2, March 1962, p. 45.

²⁸ Douglas Kennedy, 'On the Annual General Meeting', English Dance and Song, Vol. XXIII, No.1, January 1959, pp. 5-7 and Gordon Ridgewood 'Letter: That Word 'Folk'', English Dance and Song, Vol. XXV, No.6, Sept 1963, p. 201.

²⁹ See, for instance, Sydney Carter, 'Pop Goes the Folk Song', New Year, 1961.

²⁹ Hugh Rippon, 'The Yardstick That Matters is Sales', p. 45.

traditionally'.³⁰ With grander ambitions Brian George, Head of BBC Central Programme Operations, initiated a folk song collecting scheme which began in 1947 and continued until 1957, regularly providing material for a variety of features.³¹ Another programme called Ballad and Blues ran in 1951 and featured singers like Ewan MacColl and A.L. Lloyd, while its successor As I Roved Out was heard by an estimated audience of one and a half million each week.³² Regular broadcasts of 'square-dancing' facilitated a minor craze in this period which also generated wider interest in folk dance and song. Equally important were prestige projects like Charles Parker's 'Radio Ballads' series, which began in 1958, and is discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

While the mass media allowed wider access and appreciation of folk, the development of new technologies meant better and cheaper recording of performers, in the field and studio. Cheap reproductions allowed small specialist labels such as Argo to thrive by appealing to a direct market. The availability of these new collections contributed to the formation and identity of an alternative cultural network: the records inspired enthusiasts to study, learn and imitate songs as well as to form their own clubs.³³

Most important to the character of the Revival was the Topic label, which was established in 1939 by the Workers Music Association (WMA). The WMA itself was formed by the London Labour Choral Union and the Co-Operative

³⁰ Karl Dallas, 'The Roots of Tradition' in Dave Laing, Karl Dallas, Robin Denselow and Robert Shelton, The Electric Muse: The Story of Folk into Rock, Methuen, London, 1975, p. 88.

³¹ Marie Slocombe, (Letters) 'The B.B.C. and Folk Music', English Dance and Song, Vol. XXVI, No.3, April 1964, pp. 66-7.

³² See Anon, 'Flourishing Folk Song and Dance', The Times, 10 January 1959, p. 7.

³³ See Alun Howkins, 'Obituary: A.L. Lloyd', History Workshop Journal, No.15, Spring 1983, pp. 213-4.

Musical Associations, ultimately operating as a cultural arm of the CPGB. As such its agenda was indicative of the moment, its aim to inspire the people through music 'for the betterment of society'. Members included communist inspired classical composers like Michael Tippett and Alan Bush (WMA President) who sought to make their work accessible to proletarian listeners, incorporating popular and 'authentic' jazz and blues influences as well as folk song.³⁴ Available as mail order 78s Topic releases reflected ideas of what constituted a 'people's music'. Its first release combined 'Unity Theatre's' Paddy Ryan singing 'The Man that Waters the Workers' Beer' as well as Bush's arrangement of the 'Internationale' (TRC1). Subsequent discs included a repertoire of Soviet choral works but also renditions of traditional folk tunes such as 'Van Dieman's Land (ballad of transportation)' (TRC4), 'The Cutty Wren (English medieval revolutionary song)' (TRC7).

Topic also provided the first recordings by Ewan MacColl: 'The Asphalter's Song', 'Four Pence a Day' (TRC 39) and 'The Four Loom Weaver' (TRC40) appeared as early as 1950.³⁵ MacColl (1915-89) had been instrumental in Manchester's 'Theatre Action' under his given name of Jimmie Miller, where songs and skits had formed an integral part of the material. In the next few years he produced some of the defining works of the post-war Revival on Topic (as well as many other labels). At Topic he was one of a roster of artists that included A.L. Lloyd, the Stewart Family, Anne Briggs, the Spinners, Louis Killen, Jeannie

³⁴ E.g. Tippett's 'Concerto for Double String Orchestra', as discussed by David Matthews, 'The Rehabilitation of the Vernacular' in (ed.), Christopher Norris, Music and the Politics of Culture, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1989, pp. 240-251. See also Michael Tippett, Those Twentieth Century Blues: An Autobiography, Hutchinson, London, 1991 and Nancy Bush, Alan Bush: Music, Politics and Life, Thames, London, 2000.

³⁵ Brocken has compiled a full Topic discography at http://www.mustrad.org.uk/discos/dis_txt1.htm.

Robertson. The label also imported American material from Pete Seeger, Paul Robeson and Woody Guthrie.³⁶

During the war, as part of its Keynote series of publications, the WMA commissioned A.L. Lloyd's The Singing Englishman: an Introduction to Folk-Song (1944). Lloyd (1908-82) was a classic working-class autodidact, 'a man of parts'.³⁷ A CPGB member, he produced the first English translation of Garcia Lorca's Blood Wedding, a version subsequently performed by 'Theatre of Action'. More importantly he had produced Voice of the Seaman (1938), a documentary for the BBC that explored the world of deep-sea fishermen in their own words and during the war was a regular contributor to Picture Post ('his name seemed almost everywhere').³⁸ Often unemployed, he also spent hours in the British Library studying English folk song. With the publication of his book he established himself as a leading authority on the subject.

Influenced by the nascent Marxist historiography of A.L. Morton and other CPGB members, Lloyd's treatise read the folk corpus in a new way, as the expression of a *radical* political tradition. Later reprinted as a contribution to the Festival of Britain, this work underlines the importance of the post-war publishing boom, particularly the rise of the cheap paperback.³⁹ Thus, in much the same manner as with records, characteristics and developments in the Revival can be traced

³⁶ See <http://www.topicrecords.co.uk/>. On Topic's origins see Ken Hunt, 'A Topic of Conversation', Folk Roots, No.47, May 1987, p. 19 ff.

³⁷ Howkins, 'Obituary: A.L. Lloyd', p. 213.

³⁸ *Ibid.* He also co-wrote (with Igor Vinogradoff) Shadow of the Swastika, an early piece of anti-Nazi propaganda broadcast by the BBC (tx Nov-Jan 1939-40, it had audiences of up to 12 million). See A.L. Lloyd and Igor Vinogradoff, Shadow of the Swastika, John Lane, London, 1940.

³⁹ On the Festival of Britain see: Becky Conekin, The Autobiography of a Nation: The 1951 Festival of Britain, Representing Britain in the Post-War Era, Manchester University Press, Manchester (forthcoming).

through a number of key publications. A formative list would include: A.L. Lloyd, Come All Ye Bold Miners - Ballads and Songs of the Coalfield, Coaldust Ballads (1952); Ewan MacColl, The Shuttle and Cage: Industrial Folk Ballads (1954); James Reeves, The Idiom of the People: Traditional English Verse...from the Manuscripts of Cecil J. Sharp (1958), Ralph Vaughan Williams and A.L. Lloyd (eds.), The Penguin Book of English Folk Songs, and latterly Lloyd's Folk Song in England (1967) – ostensibly an update of The Singing Englishman.

Alongside these books the development and availability of new types of office equipment provided chances to cyclostyle journals and song sheets. Information, ideas and topics of debate were circulated in a prodigious variety of magazines. Those with a national circulation were Ethnic, Sing Out, Folk Review, Folk Music, The Recorder, and Sing. Sing Out came from the USA, Sing from London; published by The London Youth Choir and WMA, its first editorial announced that it hoped 'to play an important role in the struggle for peace and socialism'.⁴⁰ Regionally produced yet more-widely disseminated titles included the local newsletters of the EFDSS such as Tykes' News in the West Riding, Liverpool's Spin and the magazines of university societies, e.g. Oxford's Heritage and Leeds' Abe's Folk Music.⁴¹ In one or two places there was even an attempt to revive the practice of selling topical Broad­sides in the street.⁴²

But the Revival was not merely about song collections, broadcasts and the forging of an imagined community. Its identity as an organic, 'popular', grassroots

⁴⁰ Quoted in Diana Loesser, 'Some Aspects of the Folk-Song Movement in Contemporary Britain', Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Vol. 16, No.1, 1986, p. 57.

⁴¹ See Pickering and Green 'Towards a Cartography of the Vernacular Milieu', p. 32.

⁴² As reported by Martha Vicinus, Broad­sides of the Industrial North, Frank Graham, Newcastle-

movement was afforded by a vigorous club and pub culture, which was itself responsible for the generation of many of these recordings and publications. As Andrew Blake has suggested, folk networks emphasised contact between performer and audience, involving a denial of the star system so profitable to the mainstream music 'industry'. This was attended by a preference for generally smaller venues, low fees and management of clubs and groups by committee.⁴³ Even in larger folk clubs organisers and participants were keen to stress the intimate atmosphere.

It is often assumed that this grassroots movement began in London with the establishment of the 'Ballads and Blues' club run by MacColl in Soho Square. As Karl Dallas has commented however, even in London there were those that predated it - the 'Troubadour', the 'Breadbasket', and the 'Gyre' and 'Gimble' coffee houses, but 'the oldest surviving folk club in Britain, if not the world, is Bradford's Topic'.⁴⁴ Whichever was first, by 1959 there was still only six clubs in the UK, although these increased to forty-five in 1961 and eighty in 1962.⁴⁵ 'Ballads and Blues' claimed a membership of 4000 or more, while by the mid-Sixties 'The Jug O'Punch' in Birmingham - not the only club in the city - had approximately 3000. Its Thursday night residency at the Digbeth Civic Hall attracted a regular audience of 500, subsidising classes in folk music and dance.⁴⁶ Such was the proliferation of venues and demand for folk that as veteran performers Norma Waterson and Christy Moore have both recently recalled, they could be kept occupied with tours of

upon-Tyne, 1975, p. 20.

⁴³ Andrew Blake, The Land Without Music: Music, Culture and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1997, p. 88 ff.

⁴⁴ Karl Dallas, 'Impressions of the Red Megaphone', Political Song News, No. 11, March 1991, p. 14.

⁴⁵ See: 'Advertisement for Sing', Club Folk, Vol.1, No.1, May 1967, p. 16.

⁴⁶ See Lorna Campbell 'We Are Proud of it and it is an Important Part of Our Lives', in Ibid, p. 14.

specific regions. Areas such as Tyneside and Greater Manchester could provide performers with work twenty-six nights in a month.⁴⁷

Despite its autonomy and variety, this new strand of the Revival by its very character, and often by design, constituted a direct challenge to the EFDSS. The disciples of Cecil Sharp had accrued authority and vital resources, their organisation stood for a patronising approach to working-class culture, ossifying it as a thing of the past. With Princess Margaret as patron it seemed to stand for the establishment and the Old World. When that old pagan Robert Graves wrote of the even older popular culture that 'the radio, the cinema, and television have killed all that' he displayed his ignorance. Insult was added to injury when he advised that 'ballads are nobody's property'.⁴⁸ Exactly *whose* property folk song was, whose heritage it spoke to and who had abused it were now issues of vital importance.

In early recognition of the potential of the new era and generation of collectors and performers, Lloyd waxed lyrical over the fact that what had once been the province of educationalists and parsons, was now a spontaneous event in youth clubs, pubs and trade union branches. It was popular with those who were the 'true heirs' to rural folk music.⁴⁹ One thing that new enthusiasts had in common was a propensity for argument about the subject. Unable to agree on what it was exactly, it was easier to define it by what it was *not*: not middle class; not aesthete's music; not a form blessed by authority. It was *definitely* of the exploited: the working class.⁵⁰ Consequently, where folk music was produced and shared was an issue. Tony

⁴⁷ In 'As I Roved Out', A Smooth Operations Production, BBC Radio 2, *tx* in seven parts, 25 August 1999-29 September 1999.

⁴⁸ Robert Graves, English and Scottish Ballads, Heinemann, London, 1977 (first published 1957), p. xxv.

Davies of the Spinners Club in Liverpool advised that anyone establishing a venue should avoid situating it in places associated with formality, officialdom and stuffiness - churches, schools and so on. In this sense pubs were the appropriate locus of Revival activities.⁵¹

As part of its aim of bringing 'quality' culture to the people, Arnold Wesker's Centre 42 project included folk music as an integral part of its programme. In search of Union sponsorship, Wesker proselytized for a responsible, proprietary attitude to this valuable working class heritage. Centre 42 Festival programmes announced that: 'It is fitting that today's trades unionists should be the patrons of the current revival since it was their ancestors who created Britain's traditional music; they are the rightful custodian of that tradition and the only people by whom it can be perpetuated'.⁵²

The question of who 'owned' folk arose in more pragmatic ways too. The relationship of the early collector and peasant was clearly one of exploitation - economically and culturally. Collectors of the EFDSS had retained the copyright to all materials they 'discovered'. Nowadays lower class informants may have been more empowered, feeling the rigours of the social hierarchy less keenly, but it was commerce that was the contemporary villain as pop stars and producers turned traditional material into 'hits'. Concerned with the rapaciousness of 'showbusiness', Lloyd repeatedly raised questions of copyright and the claims to

⁴⁹ A.L. Lloyd, 'Folk-Song for Our Time', Marxist Quarterly, No.1, Jan 1954, p. 47.

⁵⁰ Anthony Schooling, 'Folk Song Revival', Social Commentary, September 1964, p. 36.

⁵¹ Tony Davis, 'Folksong for the Folk', English Dance and Song, Vol. XXV, No.2, March 1962, p. 43.

⁵² Fortytwo: For the People of Nottingham, Nottingham Trades Council Presents Festival One A Week of Music, Theatre, Dance, Paintings and Exhibitions. September 23rd-29th 1962 (Centre 42 Programme), p. 17.

authorship/arrangement by every Soho 'folknik and city-billy' who stuck his name to traditional songs.⁵³

What was at stake in questions of the ownership of this heritage were definitions of the nation, a point recognised by the EFDSS. It was suggested that, in the interests of folk itself, 'progress ... can only lie in the creation of an entirely new Englishness'.⁵⁴ On a practical level this can be compared to Maynard Keynes' conception of the Arts Council and its challenge to metropolitan values. Despite branches nationwide the EFDSS was clearly an organisation whose activities centered upon Cecil Sharp House and London. One of the characteristics of the post-war Revival was its regionalism, a rapid and uneven growth in areas such as Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle and Glasgow. Certainly, there was major activity in the capital, but this did not determine what went on elsewhere; if anything the regions were more prodigious in yielding up material because of their unexplored traditions. Lloyd, for instance, found a wealth of song in the North East while clubs about the country were often a focus for strictly local collecting.⁵⁵

In a similar vein, debates about the interpretation of folk song and its definition can be allied to the rise of the vernacular: literally the increasing sound of other voices in the social sphere. While song was inevitably associated with dialect speech this was tempered by its long-standing association with EFDSS collectors

⁵³ A.L. Lloyd, 'Who Owns What in Folk Song?', *New Year*, 1961, p. 15.

⁵⁴ G.E. Cooke, 'Letter: Why do we do it?', *English Dance and Song*, Vol. XXVIII, No.5, Winter 1966, p. 134. Similar sentiments were expressed by 'The Editor' in 'Folk Bubbling', *English Dance and Song*, Vol. XXVII, No.1, December 1964, p. 3. One of the first attempts to scrutinise Englishness as a historical and cultural construction is Robert Colls and Philip Dodd (eds), *Englishness: Politics and Culture, 1880-1920*, Croom Helm, London, 1986. They suggest that hitherto the concept had been 'unexamined'; this comment suggests otherwise.

⁵⁵ E.g., Michael and John Raven, *Folklore and Songs of the Black Country (Being a Brief Resume of the Little Known Folklore of the Black Country and Staffordshire)*, Wolverhampton Folk Song Club,

and members, collecting material for performance in their drawing rooms accompanied by gentle pianoforte arrangements. Issues of authority and authenticity now accounted for vociferous arguments over who could sing what songs and in what ways. One result was a pervasive inverted snobbery, as identified by Patrick Shuldham-Shaw of the EFDSS: 'Folk songs with a B.B.C. accent? Anathema! Horrible! These people should never touch folk songs - if he wants to sing let him sing something else'.⁵⁶

From its inception the English Folk Song Revival had been attracted to the simple yet transcendent poetry of *rural* folk song. And of course, the Arcadian 'Englishness' that it expressed was quite exclusive. As Martin Wiener has argued, in spite of the fact that the majority of the population been urban for the last two hundred years, English national identity has been defined through bucolic imagery.⁵⁷ This sense of identity was something that we saw in circulation during the war, particularly in the practices and cultural politics of CEMA. It is an idea neatly summarised in the metonymy of a popular song of the era, written in 1939 by Ross Parker and Hugh Charles:

There 'll always be an England

While there's a country lane,

Wherever there's a cottage small

Beside a field of grain.

Wolverhampton, 1965; Roy Palmer, *Songs of the Midlands*, EP Publishing, Wakefield, 1972.

⁵⁶ Patrick Shuldham-Shaw, 'How to Sing a Folk Song: 1. What Accent?', *English Dance and Song*, Vol. XXIV, No.4, March 1961, p. 108

⁵⁷ Martin J. Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850-1980*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1992, p. 46.

While folk songs are inextricably associated with these tropes what is notable about the post-war Revival is how it developed an interest in grittier, more urban traditions. This was expressed in a new genre called Industrial Folk Song, represented by Topic collections such as Shuttle and Cage (10T13, 1958), The Collier's Rant (Top 74, 1962) and Steam Whistle Ballads (12T104, 1964). In the sleevenotes to the best-selling The Iron Muse (12T86, 1963), *the* paradigmatic collection, Lloyd described the generic term as a convenience, but the songs themselves 'were created out of ... daily experience and circulated, mainly by word of mouth to be used by the songwriters workmates in mines, mills and factories'.⁵⁸ The relevance of such material was underscored by the contrast in conceptions of the folk corpus. The origins of the rural song for instance, were difficult to locate in space and time; it was felt that the idiom expressed an immemorial way of life that was vanished nonetheless. In Industrial Song subjects were more immediate - historical and geographical locales were recognisable – born of relatively recent times of change and conflict.

A collection like Topic's Deep Lancashire: Songs and Ballads of the Industrial North West (12T188, 1968) presented songs of protest, of work, the erotic, the ribald as well as children's play songs, 'showing all the pathos and humour, humanity and unity of the oppressed working people of the time'.⁵⁹ The genre relied upon regional identities, which connoted authority and authenticity, on behalf of both text and performer. Adverts and reviews for The Iron Muse, for

⁵⁸ Notes by A.L. Lloyd, Various Artists, The Iron Muse: A Panorama of Industrial Folk Music, Topic Records, 12T86 (reissued as TSCD 465).

⁵⁹ Anon, 'Record Review', Club Folk, Vol.2, No.3, May/June 1969, p. 210.

instance, emphasised the presence of regional singers, born and bred in the locales dealt with in songs.⁶⁰

Thus, the industrial genre aestheticised a milieu not readily associated with culture and certainly not with conventional concepts of art and beauty. This development is conveyed by the original sleeve of The Iron Muse, which presents one with a vista of endless back-to-back houses and factories. The image is itself an index of industrious (and industrial) working-class community and authenticity, exactly what could be found in the songs themselves. It might be Salford, 'the town of Friedrich Engels, the classic industrial slum city', and in fact it calls to mind MacColl's play for Theatre Workshop 'Landscape With Chimneys', for which the song 'Dirty Old Town' was written, with its evocative imagery of gasworks, canal, steel and fire.⁶¹ It is a symbolic terrain that at the time was supposed to be under threat but proved nonetheless to be an abiding, if archaic icon. It was registered in Richard Hoggart's best-selling The Uses of Literacy (1957), the *mise-èn-scene* of the phenomenal Coronation Street on television (1960-), and Saturday Night, Sunday Morning (1960) in the cinema.⁶² As Raphael Samuel observes, this was the period in which the term 'industrial archeology' was coined (in 1955), as much of interest and beauty was discovered amongst the 'derelict waste' of the urban

⁶⁰ 'Record Topics' (advertisement feature for Topic Records), Club Folk, Vol. 1, No.6, September-October 1968, pp. 11-14.

⁶¹ Anon, 'Notes' to Ewan MacColl. Black and White, Green Linnet Records, D1204, 1990.

⁶² For a useful discussion of this milieu in relation to realist and romantic portrayals see Andrew Higson, 'Space, Place, Spectacle: Landscape and Townscape in the "Kitchen Sink" Film' in Andrew Higson (ed.), Dissolving Views: Key Writing on British Cinema. Cassell, London, 1996, pp. 133-156. In the same collection Terry Lovell suggests how Richard Hoggart's The Uses of Literacy resonates in 'Kitchen Sink' drama. Terry Lovell, 'Landscapes and Stories in 1960s British Realism', pp. 157-177.

landscape.⁶³ The BBC had a role in this too, presenting industrial folk as part of its Schools Broadcasting service, to the point when it was installed as a significant 'icon of the national past'.⁶⁴ The series Yesterday's Witness, which ran from 1968, is credited by Samuel for giving 'a human face to industrial archeology'.⁶⁵

Samuel offers some rationale for this discovery. During a period of economic boom, when Britain still seemed to hold a prominent place in the world, these neglected aspects of the past were linked to the achievements of the present and indeed the prosperity and progress of the future. Within the Revival the very idea of Industrial Folk Song was the site of a variety of ideas. It indicated that the difference between what had constituted folk music for the EFDSS and what it was for post-war revivalists was literally a matter of life and death. For the former, the tradition was defunct, with only a few old and isolated practitioners to remind one of its rustic glories. To the newer generation, the lineage of folk could be traced right up to the present day in locales previously held responsible for its death. Within the post-war Revival the practice of folk song was robust and radical, as opposed to the effete thing favoured by the middle-class dilettantes of the EFDSS. Bert Lloyd opined that the immediate future of folk music lay in the hands of creative revivalists like Ewan MacColl - as opposed to EFDSS survivalists. The new breed sought to imbibe and *reproduce* 'the characteristic of folk-song in its workaday clothes'.⁶⁶

⁶³ In Michael Rix, 'Industrial Archeology', The Amateur Historian, Vol.2, No.8, October-November 1955, pp. 225-6. Discussed in Samuel, Island Stories: Unravelling Britain: Theatres of Memory, Volume II, Verso, London and New York, p. 220.

⁶⁴ Samuel, Theatres of Memory, Volume 2, p. 220.

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 235.

⁶⁶ See A.L. Lloyd, 'Recent Recordings', English Dance and Song, Vol. XVII, No.2, Oct-Nov, 1952, p. 53.

Within this framework, the developing discourse of folk may be understood as a means of *redeeming* 'the masses', or rather a means of extricating the working-classes from that amorphous category. The Revival and the corpus of Industrial Folk Song delineated a valid cultural history, describing a creative response to the world and the experience of modernity. For example, in 1947 the liberal B.B.C. producer D.G. Bridson had formulated a 'ballad-opera' called 'Johnny Miner'. Bridson envisaged this as the portrayal of an archetypal figure, the essence of the pitman represented historically through 150 years of song.⁶⁷ Anticipating the development of Industrial Folk Song, this musical tribute was intended '*to show that the miner as well as the rural labourer has his folk songs*'.⁶⁸ Such projects endorsed the 'Age of the Common Man' by introducing a rootedness and humanity denied in disdainful descriptions of 'the masses'. In this, the Revival also anticipated E.P. Thompson's project to rescue the people 'from the enormous condescension of posterity'.⁶⁹ In its insistence on the continuity of tradition and working class creativity it was also a challenge to the condescension of the present. Industrial Folk Song was celebrated as 'a reproof to those who profess to believe that the whole horizon of the working class is bounded by the bingo and the idiot's lantern'.⁷⁰

While the post-war Revival was something largely independent of EFDSS control, and despite the interest in the industrial milieu, it also inherited aspects of its archaic and Arcadian impulses. For EFDSS members the appeal of folk lay in its artistry, collective nature and the invitation to *perform*. Many deplored the advance

⁶⁷ See D.G. Bridson, *Prospero and Ariel*, London, Victor Gollancz, 1971, p. 143.

⁶⁸ (My italics) 'The Broadcaster', 'Both Sides of the Mirror', *Radio Times*, Vol. 98, No.1268, 30 January 1948, p. 5. The programme was broadcast at 8.00pm, 27 December 1947 and later repeated in February of the following year.

of the machine age 'and the modern desire to become spectators rather than participants'.⁷¹ Creativity meant *activity*, qualities that were indispensable to democracy and likewise, despite its intractable relationship with the media, Revivalists formulated an identity at odds with the burgeoning commercial culture of the 1950s. Leavisite educationalist David Holbrook, for instance, found even the Reitheian BBC's attention to folk song 'the last twist of the knife in their destruction by mechanical culture'.⁷²

The contribution of folk song to 'the struggle against admass' was implicit and newly composed songs expressed this idea directly.⁷³ One song by Karl Dallas commented on the Derek Bentley murder case, suggesting of his witless accomplice Christopher Craig that *'It was guns and comics, films of war, that made his education'*. Similarly, Liverpool's The Spinners commented on 'The Lure of TV':

Come all you young fellows and listen to me,

Seek not entertainment by watching TV,

For your eyes they will wither and sink in your head

*Till 'This Is Your Life' makes you wish you were dead.*⁷⁴

Samuel has further suggested of the Revival that it 'may be said to represent a sense of cultural loss which in recent years in Britain has been a major response to

⁶⁹ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 13.

⁷⁰ Lloyd, 'Sleevenotes', *The Iron Muse*.

⁷¹ Peter Fox, 'Another Glance at the Future', *English Dance and Song*, Vol.VI. No.1, October 1941, p. 6. See also Douglas Kennedy, 'Our English Dances: An Historical Sketch', *English Dance and Song*, Vol.V, No.1, October 1940, pp. 2-3

⁷² David Holbrook, 'English Folk Song in the Teaching of Poetry and Music', *Cambridge Institute of Education Bulletin*, Vol 1, No.7, May 1956, p. 4.

⁷³ Loesser, 'Some Aspects of the Folk-Song Movement in Contemporary Britain', p. 54.

⁷⁴ Quoted in Leslie Shepard, 'The Ballads Today', *New Society*, No.12, 20 December 1962, p. 25.

the fruits of post-war social change'.⁷⁵ Even as working-class life, its forms and its milieu was being captured and celebrated, it was altering – responding to the benefits of Welfare State and economic stability, but also to more threatening developments. A contemporary description of miners singing folk songs in a pub emphasises the sound of Independent Television in an adjacent bar, occasionally heard as the beer is brought through. The communal tradition, 'as old as this oldest of all coalfields' has survived, despite 'The post-war boom and the cry of the Telly'.⁷⁶ Thus, for collectors like John Raven the identification of performers and audiences with folk music suggested a search for something solid and eternal in a neurotic society characterised by superficial standards and insubstantial ideals.⁷⁷

In opposition to the ersatz qualities of mass culture, folk music connoted 'authenticity' in its mode of performance and consumption. Many singers were unaccompanied singers but any instrumentation was acoustic and songs were performed in pubs, as opposed to concert halls or bourgeois drawing rooms. There is an impression too of folk clubs as the scene of carnivalesque, communal revelry, Brocken affectionately labels this the 'raucous, boozy and sexy Ceilidh'.⁷⁸ Politically radical, satirical and bawdy tunes were accompanied by free-flowing (real) ale.⁷⁹ Such images are tempered by a consideration of the seriousness that

⁷⁵ Samuel, 'History Workshop, 1966-80', p. 413

⁷⁶ David Bean, 'The Singing Miners', *Coal Quarterly*, Vol.1, No.5, Spring 1963, p. 7

⁷⁷ John Raven, *The Urban and Industrial Songs of the Black Country and Birmingham*, Broadside, Wolverhampton, 1977.

⁷⁸ Brocken, 'The Battle of the Field', p. 5.

⁷⁹ Perhaps there is an argument here for ale as the 'taste of history'. The Society for the Preservation of Beers from Wood was founded in December 1963, 'with the purpose of drawing attention to the growing decline in both quality and palatability of beer ... big brewers ... were threatening the availability of traditional draught beer'. <http://www.brewworld.com/organisations/spbw.html> (Visited 18 June 2001). The Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) began in March 1971. See Roger Protz and Tony Millns (eds), *Called to the Bar: An Account of the First 21 Years of the Campaign For Real Ale*, CAMRA, St. Albans, 1992.

could surround both performances and the attention of audiences. As a member of the EFDSS pointed out of the early folk collectors, one did not think of their aim as being about 'fun' at all.⁸⁰ This could also serve as a description of the theorists of the post-war Revival. The appreciation and generation of folk was highly studious in approach, involving the researching of the origins of ballads, lyrics and tunes, and fieldwork directed at the discovery of traditional singers.⁸¹ This scholarly approach was a contributory factor in the self-consciousness of the Revival and can be understood in a political sense as a legitimising exercise. In comparison with the minority tradition for instance, folk song has no identifiable *genii*. Its claim to greatness, to be 'culture' seemed uncertain. Scholarly approaches sought to demonstrate its authenticity and pedigree. It was also about establishing which texts were genuine and which were the products of middle-class interlopers and bowdlerisers.

Similarly, such strategies emphasised continuities of tradition through songs or customs in ways that could not be claimed by an ever innovative and garish mass media. In consumption and performance, the appeal of folk lay in the fact that it was not something leisurely, easy and freely available - like a million-selling pop record for instance. To appreciate folk one had to learn about it, to participate, and to understand it properly one had to *apply* oneself. One reviewer commended MacColl

⁸⁰ Anon, 'Stinking Ydols', English Dance and Song, Vol. XXV, No.3, pp. 71-72.

⁸¹ E.g. The work of singer Johnny Handle, including his articles 'Industrial Folk Music and Regional Music Hall in the North East', English Dance and Song, Vol. XXVII, No.4, August 1965, pp 106-8; 'Industrial Folk Music and Regional Music Hall in the North East Part 2: Growth and Extent of the Music Hall', English Dance and Song, Vol. XXVII, No.5, October 1965, pp. 138-141 and 'Music of the Miners', English Dance and Song, Vol. XXVIII, No.1, Jan 1966, pp. 6-9. Many Topic releases came with liner notes or pamphlets. A Soldier's Life For Me (12T196) for instance, comes with a booklet of lyrics, each with a discussion of the song's origins, form and meaning as well as footnotes and bibliography.

and Peggy Seeger's work on their ambitious series The Long Harvest (Argo DA 66-69, 1968) for its scholarship. Here was evidence of how songs could not be learned one day and instantly sung the next with any degree of finesse, 'one should assimilate the material gradually, until one has got inside the song completely'.⁸²

For others however, this approach was soulless and anaemic. It was suggested that in pursuit of 'authenticity' a new orthodoxy had developed that presented deadly dull versions of what originally had been delightful celebrations of the human spirit. At times, a studied approach to 'genuine' interpretation could in fact make older singers sound un-folksy! Precious, meticulous and pedantic treatment of songs as frail documents – as evinced in the policy of Topic and its artists - could actually inhibit the presentation of the tradition as lively and vital to contemporary life.⁸³

In spite of the dream of community expressed by the idea of folk and its generation, its histories have often described the genius and contribution of particular individuals. Key figures here include the American folklorist Alan Lomax, and Lloyd and MacColl. It is certainly the case that the ubiquity of these figures, each with coherent agendas about what constituted folk and its future, meant that their ideas and influence cannot be underestimated, although they have been *overplayed*. The Communist affiliations of MacColl and Lloyd for instance have provided Harker with evidence that they were the vanguard of the Party's conscious

⁸² Tony Rose, 'Record Reviews', Club Folk, Vol.1, No.2, November-December, 1967, p. 19.

⁸³ On these points see Eric Winter, 'Record Reviews: The Long Harvest (Argo 70-72)', Club Folk, Vol.1, No.5, July-August 1968, p. 11; John Charlesworth, 'Topic for Discussion', Use of English, Vol.23, No.4, Summer 1972, p. 378 and John Remsbury, 'Lines for Listeners', English Dance and Song, Vol. XXVII, No.3, April 1965, p. 69.

plan to generate a radical popular culture.⁸⁴ This flawed theory is less important than the fact that, as Gerald Porter and others have demonstrated, the work of individual communists and cultural cells was vital to how folk music came to be understood as a committed form with immediate political relevance and allegiance.

Eric Winter, the Editor of Sing magazine suggested that there was an identification of folk and the left 'because people with left-wing ideas are more conscious of a clear link between politics and art. Communists openly state, and many Socialists believe, that art has a social purpose'.⁸⁵ The administrators of the EFDSS were rather bemused by such ideas and the development of what appeared to be entirely another world. At the 'Singers Club' (Formerly 'Ballads and Blues') under MacColl, Lloyd and Seeger for example, there was no dancing - an integral part of the first Revival. It was observed that the audience seemed keener to march against Apartheid or the H-Bomb than learn 'the Morpeth Rant'.⁸⁶ Folk song thus provided far more than 'the foundations on which a more mutual musical art must be built'.⁸⁷ It was intimately connected to the way in which the scene sat in relation to social 'issues' and its vibrant political culture. Folk received serious coverage in the journals of the old and New Left. Anyone interested in politics, perhaps university students or those attending New Left clubs, would inevitably come into contact with

⁸⁴ See Harker's, One for the Money, and Fakesong. He suggests an almost direct relationship between the lyrics of songs and the Politburo. The interesting thing about his assertion is that the CP seems to have been able to manipulate and plan a highly successful cultural campaign while unable to make significant inroads into the political arena. The thesis is still being repeated, most recently by C.P. Lee, Like the Night: Bob Dylan and the Road to the Manchester Free Trade Hall, Helter Skelter, London, 1998.

⁸⁵ Anon, "'Going Political" Talking to Eric Winter', New Year, 1961, p. 12.

⁸⁶ 'Editorial', English Dance and Song, Vol.XXIV, No.5, September 1961, p. 139.

⁸⁷ Ralph Vaughan Williams and A.L. Lloyd (eds), The Penguin Book of English Folk Songs, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1959, p. 10.

folk music (or jazz for that matter). Similarly, anyone happening to encounter the folk scene would probably be exposed to its political edge and connections.⁸⁸

In Birmingham, Ian Campbell had been a member of the Clarion Singers Choir when it toured Czechoslovakia in the mid-1950s. It was there that he had first encountered a vibrant ethnic folk music. Its attractions and authenticity seemed apparent to one steeped in the critique of American culture developed by the CPGB, of which he was also a member.⁸⁹ Subsequently, Campbell became a key performer and composer in the Revival, also establishing one of the country's largest folk clubs with the Jug O'Punch.⁹⁰ Irishman Luke Kelly, later of 'The Dubliners', recalled that his interest and education in folk and politics were intertwined. An itinerant worker, drifting from job to job around the country he encountered the folk scene in all its aspects, galvanised by what he stumbled on in a Newcastle club run by Louis Killen, and what he heard on the radio by MacColl and Lloyd. Ending up in Birmingham he lodged with Sean and Molly Mulready, the former a radical teacher and Communist - alias Sean O'Malobhríde - who had been persecuted by the conservative press at home in the Republic. Kelly's developing political conviction was marked when he joined CND and the local Young Communist League (YCL). In 1961 his cultural affiliation was assured when he joined the Clarion Choir, which was already developing work with BBC producer Charles Parker – the man responsible for the Radio Ballads series. The Choir was directed by Musician's Union activist and

⁸⁸ E.g., as embodied in the Topic Collection Songs Against The Bomb (12001, 1960) with tracks recorded at the 'Ballads and Blues' and the 'Partisan Coffee House' – the place run by New Left Review.

⁸⁹ See Ian Campbell (Column), 'The People Who Will Make the Money', Midland Beat, No.24, September 1965, p. 2.

⁹⁰ See Topic's live document of the Jug of Punch, Ceilidh at the Crown (TOP76, 1962) and The Ian Campbell Folk Group, Songs of Protest (TOP 82, 1962).

CPGB member Katherine Thomson.⁹¹ Her husband George Thomson, Professor of Classics at the University of Birmingham and a key cultural theorist in the Party, ran a local Marxist study group where folk was discussed and theorised (see p. 209).

Kelly identified exactly what it was about this music of the left that attracted him; it was 'romantic and rejuvenating. It was about realism'.⁹² This is where the radical promise (and appeal) of folk music lay. Realism is an aesthetic strategy and as we have seen in the previous chapter, the presence of the working class has often served as a guarantee of the 'real' in its political associations and also through its apparently unaffected, earthy culture. Thus, a key component of folk realism was the *rediscovery* of a tradition of sexual commentary in songs and the associated use of ribald language. It was a truism that a natural, lower class transparency and earthy wit had been suppressed by collectors such as Cecil Sharp and by bourgeois authority in general. In 1905 for instance, the English Board of Education had cautioned about the suitability of certain songs for use in schools.⁹³ And as late as 1948 the broadcast of a staple source of innuendo 'The Foggy Foggy Dew' on Family Favourites, caused the BBC to insist upon the restriction of such materials.⁹⁴ In the late 1950s however, educationalist James Reeves had gone back to original EFDSS manuscripts, publishing unamended material in his The Idiom of the People. This collection demonstrated how ancient songs such as 'Rosemary Lane' had been

⁹¹ Who also published on the question of folk in 'On Nationality in Music', Marxism Today, Vol.III, No.3, January 1959.

⁹² Quoted in Des Geraghty, Luke Kelly: A Memoir, Basement Press, Dublin, 1994, p. 40.

⁹³ Board of Education, Suggestions for the Consideration of Teachers and Others Concerned in the Work of Public Education in Schools, HMSO, London, 1905, p. 70 ff.

⁹⁴ See Asa Briggs, The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom: Vol IV: Sound and Vision, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 1995, p. 695.

rewritten by bourgeois collectors (in this case the Reverend Sabin Baring-Gould) in order to disguise the unpalatable 'honesty' of lyrics such as:

Now when the baby's born you should put it out to nurse

With silver in his pocket and gold in his purse

You should dry off your breast as a virgin so free

And pass for a virgin in some strange countrie.

Traditional songs of a 'risqué' nature such as 'The Farm Servant', 'Sporting on the Bed', 'Lish Young Buy-a-Broom' and 'Young Rambleway', became curiosities, widely available in folk circles. The latter song had added political cache for being about a labourer's dalliance with his master's wife, while one collection was specifically designed to poke fun at the prissy 'schoolmarm' image of the earlier revival. Rat-A-Tap-Tap: English Folk Songs Miss Pringle Never Taught Us by Frank Purslow and John Pearce was described as a collection of ballads of seduction and cuckolding, presented in a 'naughty-looking cover'.⁹⁵

The interest in such material can be related to the liberalisation of social mores in the period, symbolised in Philip Larkin's observation in Annus Mirabilis (1974) that '*Sexual intercourse began/In nineteen sixty-three/ ... Between the end of the Chatterley ban/And the Beatles' first LP*'. Folk song was certainly understood as constituting a challenge to the mores of a prudish society. At the 1966 London Folk Festival, Lloyd opined that the problematisation of the issue of sex, in songs and elsewhere, was emblematic of middle-class prejudice. For him, the freedom of the

⁹⁵ Anon, 'Record Reviews', English Dance and Song, Vol XXIV, No.2, Sept 1960, p. 65. See also: Topic collections The Bird in the Bush: Traditional Erotic Songs (12T135, 1966), The Folk Songs of Britain, Vol.1. The Songs of Courtship (12T157, 1968), and Vol. 2, The Songs of Seduction, (12T158 1968).

folk genre arose from a different cultural mindset – that of the working class. Reflecting on this idea, performers Dave and Toni Arthur likewise celebrated the way in which folk offered no concessions to ‘Victorian morality’, lauding the manner in which it portrayed sex as normal, a natural function.⁹⁶

There is no doubt that Sharp and others did bowdlerise songs that they collected but the extent to which the corpus could be construed as bawdy was almost certainly overdone. Allowing for the generally conservative nature of members of the EFDSS, correspondents questioned this contemporary fascination, suggesting that the ‘un-bowdlerisation’ begun by Reeves had swung to far in the *other* direction.⁹⁷ Seeking to explain the indisputable growth of folk clubs and music of this kind, an observer from The Times suggested that its appeal lay in the ‘inverted snobbery of robustly working class music and the glamour attached to downright treatments of sex and violence’.⁹⁸ David Holbrook implicitly agreed with this analysis, detecting that a caricature of the proletariat was at work. He complained of a developing ‘cult of the working man’: ‘who seems to have spent his life boozing, getting into bed with his boots on, and grumbling about the “dorty” blacklegs. It seems a pity that the cult of the hairy chested workman should dwell so much on aspects of the degradation brought about by the miseries of the Industrial Revolution, and present them as admirable’.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Dave and Toni Arthur, ‘Folksong for Schools’, English Dance and Song, Autumn 1968, Vol. XXX, No.3, pp. 84-85.

⁹⁷ Anon, ‘What Are They Trying to Prove?’, English Dance and Song, Vol. XXVIII, No.3, Summer 1966, p. 65. See also, Kenneth Loveless, ‘Review of Cecil Sharp: His Life and Work by Maud Karpeles’, Folk Music Journal, Vol.1, No.4, pp. 268-70.

⁹⁸ Anon, ‘Flourishing Folk Song and Dance’, The Times, 10 January 1959, p. 7.

⁹⁹ David Holbrook and Maurice Howarth, ‘FolkSong Records’, Use of English, Vol.19, No.4, Summer 1968, p. 321.

There was undoubtedly something problematic about the *ouvriérisme* of the Revival and the binaries reproduced and circulated in its rhetoric. The celebration of bawdiness for instance mistakes gentleness for gentility. Working-class sexuality is defined by 'masculine' attributes, celebrating a tough, rough and ready rutting in opposition to the apparently 'bourgeois' associations of 'love' and romance. In a similar way, the tone of Lloyd and MacColl's work was at odds with that developed in the EFDSS, the difference described as that of the raw and the civilised. When they performed with Seamus Ennis in April 1953, it was suggested that 'nothing quite like it has been heard before at Cecil Sharp House'.¹⁰⁰ One anonymous Society member underlined the reasons for the excitement that some felt about this event: there had been no holding back from *impolite* words, interpretations of songs were rough-hewn, not *effeminate* nor merely pretty or childish. In this framework, it is not hard to imagine why folk *dance* proved to be so inconsequential and unattractive to the post-war Revivalists.

Programmes for the series of festivals organised by Centre 42 in 1962 challenged the idea that folk music was in anyway effete, the middle-class vision of 'genteel old ladies of both sexes entertaining a captive audience at the vicar's tea-party about melancholy, shepherds and broken-hearted milkmaids'.¹⁰¹ Opposed to this was a more 'convincing' version of culture, one created by and out of the experience of 'genuine' farm labourers, deep-water sailors, ploughmen, coal miners and the nameless historical cast who have formed the *real* folk and articulated its concerns: 'The heroes of the "folk" are a tough, hard-working, hard-drinking,

¹⁰⁰ Anon, 'Folk Songs Raw and Civilised', *English Dance and Song*, Vol. XVIII, No.1, August-September 1953, p. 26.

amorous, rumbustious crew who fought and worked, cursed, loved and died. In the songs they are usually passionate in their personal relationships, they can be courageous or cowardly, generous or selfish, they are sometimes bawdy, coarse ... but they are never coy'.¹⁰²

Lloyd suggested of his collection of mining lyrics that, 'These are rough songs, mostly made by rough men'.¹⁰³ And *men's* experience of labour meant a certain type of bonding. Miners were shaped by the industrial revolution, wary, sharp-witted 'and blunt of tongue, strong set against rebuff and little inclined to lick the boots of any authority'.¹⁰⁴ Likewise for academic John Fletcher, the urban and industrial songs of the Black Country and Birmingham are expressive of 'a very rough, vulgar and vigorous society'.¹⁰⁵ This corpus portrays a world where the demands of work were unyielding, where femininity was often absent - women were as equally coarsened as the men. Appositely, then such songs are marked by an absence of 'tender, lyrical and romantic elements'.¹⁰⁶ There is an important sense of an *anti-aesthetic* at work here too, for Lloyd mining songs had not much claim to poetic art, they were works that had not been 'worn smooth' by time and tradition.

As Boyes has suggested, such attitudes were perhaps born of the pronounced yet casual misogyny of English society in general, as much as from an inverted class

¹⁰¹ Fortytwo: For the People of Nottingham (Centre 42 Programme), p. 17.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ A.L.Lloyd, Come All Ye Bold Miners: Ballads and Songs of the Coalfields, Lawrence and Wishart, London 1978, (first published 1952), p. 13.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. p. 14.

¹⁰⁵ Dr. John Fletcher, 'Foreword' in Raven, The Urban and Industrial Songs of the Black Country and Birmingham, p. xx.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. For a suggestive insight into ideas of 'authenticity' in contemporaneous politics see Martin Francis, 'The Labour Party: Modernisation, and the Politics of Restraint' in Conekin, Mort and Waters (eds), Moments of Modernity, pp. 152-170. Francis discusses the increasingly middle-class character of the identity of the Labour Party - the validation of restraint and reason. Despite this some yearned for a more authentic image whose index was passion and emotive protests, its symbol, the down-to-

prejudice. Generally speaking, a commonplace gender bias was quite naturally transposed to cultural discourse and worries about authenticity and commercialism.¹⁰⁷ Thus, bowdlerisation of rural songs was often described as an emasculating process, while the attention of the tunesmiths of Denmark Street to the genuinely popular culture of folk resulted in 'tarted-up offerings'.¹⁰⁸ Folk realism was thus understood as an antidote to the distractions of Tin Pan Alley and imported Hollywood fantasies; in macho terms it challenged the flaccidity of the 'sugary' crooner.¹⁰⁹ As one commentator noted, 'In Tin Pan Alley sex runs no deeper than the cuddle, no crueller than the broken date'.¹¹⁰

On a wider scale folk song was allied with a contemporary grittiness in drama and literature - and the new voices it heralded.¹¹¹ In New Left Review, David Craig offered an interpretation of the idiom as an alternative to the highbrow art that the journal's contributors seemed to prefer.¹¹² For him, its sensibility was built upon sincerity and access to the authenticity of 'life as it is'. Its use presented a way forward for the committed artist in his (sic) attempts to reach the people. As enlisted by authors such as Bert Brecht and lately Arnold Wesker, Brendan Behan, John Arden, John Osborne and Shelagh Delaney, it broke with the impasse of romantic or

earth working man.

¹⁰⁷ For a wider discussion of these issues see Penny Sparke, As Long As It's Pink: The Sexual Politics of Taste, Pandora, London, 1995, p. 204 ff., and Sean O'Connell, The Car and British Society: Class, Gender and Motoring, 1896-1939, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1998, p. 63 ff. The impact of feminism has been felt in folk more recently. Songs by artists like June Tabor, Norma Waterson and Eliza Carthy tell of abused wives revenging themselves on cruel and errant husbands etc.

¹⁰⁸ Holbrook and Howarth, 'Folksong Records', p. 21.

¹⁰⁹ See David Craig, The Real Foundations: Literature and Social Change, London, Chatto and Windus, 1973, p. 56.

¹¹⁰ Dave Hamilton, 'Folk Song on Both Sides of the Atlantic: In America', Communist Student (1962), p. 15.

¹¹¹ Mike Down, 'Folk Song on Both Sides of the Atlantic: In Britain', Ibid. (1962), p. 16.

¹¹² David Craig, 'The New Poetry of Socialism', New Left Review, No.17, Winter 1962, pp. 73-84.

avant-garde poetry, what Craig described as the dim moods and indulgent self-reflexivity of Yeats or Tennyson, for instance. In this analysis 'realism' as an aesthetic strategy, as something associated with working-class life also becomes an appropriately transparent form *for* the working classes too! In this instance it is possible to expand upon some of the points made in the previous chapter about the limited aesthetics of 'proletarian art'.

An important proponent of the cultural and political value of folk, Craig became engaged in a debate about its merits in 1964, in the pages of the Scotsman, with the highly sceptical Hugh MacDiarmid.¹¹³ Craig's approach indicates the manner in which existing concepts of folk song clearly lent themselves to Marxist interpretation. Its attraction lay in the perception of it as an orally transmitted tradition: it belonged to the people, held and *created* in common. The anonymity of the traditional corpus could be said to reflect the genius of the nation rather than that of the individual.¹¹⁴ According to Sharp himself, folk expressed the sincerity of 'the unconscious output of the human mind'. For folk singer Alasdair Clayre the chief relevance of folk music lay in its status as a medium in which people could sing in their own voices, examining their own and other's feelings 'without the interposition of some special cultural voice or some special commercial voice'.¹¹⁵

See also his 'Who Enjoys the Arts?', Views, No.4, Spring 1964, pp. 27-31.

¹¹³ See Alan Bold (ed.), The Letters of Hugh MacDiarmid, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1984, pp. 820-7.

¹¹⁴ Dave and Toni Arthur, 'Folk Music Breaks Down Barriers', Education, 24 October 1969, pp. 1327-8. In one post-war competition held by the EFDSS, a prize had been awarded to an essay entitled 'The Folk Song Composes Itself' - see The English Folk Dance and Song Society Report, 1946-7.

¹¹⁵ Quoted in Tony Rose, 'Talking to Alasdair Clayre', Club Folk, Vol.1, No.6, September-October, 1968, p. 5.

Here, a medium understood for the transparency of its meaning becomes one of transparent access to experience of 'the people', a position constituting the 'common-sense' of folk music. For Bert Lloyd its validity lay in its socialist and collectively democratic nature - to express 'the way ordinary people feel and speak'.¹¹⁶ Folk song was 'created directly out of the common experience and aspirations of working people'.¹¹⁷ More than this, in its urban form at least, folk provided a progressive instrument: it mirrored man's condition and encouraged him on the forward march to a *better* society. Examples of Industrial Song were understood to reflect the inexorable movement of History, conveying the political consciousness 'of the class destined to bring the just society - socialism - to birth'.¹¹⁸ In his magnum opus Folk Song in England, Lloyd argued that the 'pure', rural, pre-industrial forms so beloved of 'conventional' folklorists exhibited conservative, if not 'backward' tendencies. They evinced hostility to personal initiative yet according to dialectic principles 'personality makes itself increasingly felt'.¹¹⁹ Over time: the epic 'we' concedes to a lyrical 'I'. This individualism, while exhibited in Industrial Song itself, becomes less noticeable than the development of a *properly* 'collective' character.

Opaquely, Brocken suggests that the Revival 'appears to have been curiously bent on the destruction of modernity in urban existence for the sake of a rather

¹¹⁶ Schooling, 'Folk Song Revival', p. 37.

¹¹⁷ A.L. Lloyd, 'Folk-Song for Our Time', Marxist Quarterly, No.1, Jan 1954, p. 54.

¹¹⁸ John Miller, 'Songs of the British Radical and Labour Movement', Marxism Today, Vol.7, No.6, June 1963, p. 180. (Also published as No. 30 of Our History). See also Stephen Sedley 'Songs of the Radical and Labour Movement', Marxism Today, Vol.7, No.9, September 1963, pp. 287-8. A problem here is in Miller's historical depiction of singing as part of the culture of metropolitan and artisanal organisations such as the London Corresponding Society and the Society for Constitutional Information, while looking to the miners and textile workers of the North East for examples of this consciousness.

“glossy-eyed” retrospective analysis of “traditional” pre-industrial society’.¹²⁰ There was antagonism towards the modern, evinced in the continuing pastoralism of much of the scene, particularly as it met with the burgeoning rock culture and hippy eco-culture of the late 1960s. However, it is a rather myopic analysis of the politics and Utopianism attendant upon the theorisation of Industrial Song. Indeed, it was argued that the ‘realist’ outlook of the Industrial Song replaced the fantasy and magic of the peasant. The genre articulated the tribulations of struggle, demonstrating that men had begun to understand the philosophical and economic basis of society. For Craig, the form of urban song expressed the consciousness of those moving between the factories of the blackened cities; it conveyed the ‘iron in the soul’ of the proletariat. Like Lloyd he suggested that the development of an urban folk tradition demonstrated that Industrialism was a ‘good’ thing - in political terms at least. Viewed through the insights of radical songs, the modern proletariat demonstrated that it was of a more active nature than the peasantry, who had been characterised by what Marx termed ‘the idiocy of the village’. Thus, ‘The experience of being industrialised must have jolted the faculties into wakefulness’.¹²¹ Ideas expressed in songs such as ‘Blackleg Miners’ or ‘The Durham Lock-Out’ echoed Engels’ observations on the industrial turmoil of 1844. He had suggested that striking miners in the Northeast had awoken from a living death to become self-interested, thus entering *the movement of civilisation*.

Not unlike the activities of an earlier generation of bourgeois collectors, the discovery of *this* radical tradition involved a degree of wilful selection, based upon

¹¹⁹ Lloyd, *Folk Song in England*, p. 341.

¹²⁰ Brocken, ‘Battle of the Field’, p. 9.

doubtful criteria. This is exemplified by one of Lloyd's great collecting projects overseeing the National Coal Board (NCB) competition of 1951 in search of songs about mining. Given the considerable size of the mining workforce, this elicited a mere 100 entries, of which many were skits, parodies of popular song or 'music hall' recitations, rejected for not being of 'traditional character'. Whatever that character was exactly, it was seemingly only recognisable to Lloyd, and the competition's ten guinea prize went to a Lancashire miner. His winning song, 'Dialogue Between the Coal Owner and the Pitman's Wife' was, not unsurprisingly, the expression of exactly the kind of political rectitude and confrontational radicalism Lloyd so valued:

*So all ye gay gentlemen that's got riches instore,
Take my advice and be good to the poor,
And if you do this all things will gan well,
Perhaps it will save you from going to hell.¹²²*

As in any discussion of realism, it is merely convention to suppose that folk music bespeaks the consciousness of the people. It could, and probably has, expressed many other things too. For instance it has been suggested that the developing folk music of industrial society expressed not the radicalism of a submerged class but its conformity and *docility*. Prefiguring the consumerism of the middle of the twentieth century onwards, it articulated a concern with personal comforts and commodities.¹²³ Similarly, John Raven's series of collections

¹²¹ Craig, *The Real Foundations*, p. 66.

¹²² Quoted in Anon, 'All the Winners', *Coal*, Vol.5, No.6, Oct 1951, p. 22.

¹²³ The work is Terry MacDonald's conference paper, 'English Folksong and the Aspiration of Working People' as reported by Kelly Boyd and Rohan McWilliam, 'Historical Perspectives on Class

concentrating on the Black Country have been remarked upon for the *absence* of any expression of class conflict or political agitation.¹²⁴

Radicalism, in its leftist manifestation, is perhaps only one aspect of a wide variety of experiences and the response of the working classes (the plural term has increasing valency here) to modernity. To expand upon my suggestions in my introductory chapter, to insist upon a coherent radical tradition - documented and expressed through song - is an idea that relies upon a sense of a particular political consciousness as *the* 'historical necessity'.¹²⁵ It relies upon an idealism and *faith* in a grand narrative that is, in its own way, limited and limiting – ideas that I will expand upon in subsequent chapters. In fact, despite the professed materialism of Marxist folk theorists, much of their thinking now seems curiously essentialist.

The championing of the very fact of song, its anonymity, the insistence upon its 'correct' content, these seem intimately connected to rather conservative ideas of 'the common man'. An oral, proletarian form, derived from, and suited to the collective, song is *by its nature* public. Non-literary and described as intimately connected to conversation it is described as springing directly 'from the spoken language'.¹²⁶ Song is described as an object *of* the people, inherently popular - in all its meanings. As Robert Blatchford commented in relation to the relative importance of law-giving: 'Public law is made by a privileged class: popular ballads quite

and Culture', *Social History*, Vol.20, No.1, January 1995, pp. 93-100.

¹²⁴ See Fletcher, 'Foreword' and the earlier collections from M and J Raven. *Folklore and Songs of the Black Country and West Midlands*, Vols. 1, 2 and 3, Wolverhampton Folk Song Club, 1965, 1966, and 1967.

¹²⁵ *Pace* Louis Althusser as discussed in Wai Chee Dimock and Michael T. Gilmore, 'Introduction' in (eds), Wai Chee Dimock and Michael T. Gilmore. *Rethinking Class: Literary Studies and Social Formations*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1994, p. 4.

¹²⁶ Raymond O'Malley, 'Ballads, Condescension and Humility', *Use of English*, Autumn 1974, pp. 162. For Leavis, speech in the organic community was cultivated as an art. *Culture and Environment*:

spontaneously from the hearts of the people ... laws often enough the people could well spare: songs they will have'.¹²⁷

Pre-dating Cecil Sharp even, an important part of the discourse of folk music was the attribution of its origins to primitive antiquity, to ritual, and man's close relationship with nature. Folk, as a simple, authentic form, was understood to be evidence of an inexorably progressive evolution whose laws affected both the social and natural worlds. For the director of the EFDSS then, folk as a qualifying term meant "'natural", and "Natural" is anything that one was accustomed to do in childhood'.¹²⁸ In the same vein, and despite their suspicion of the pre-industrial, Lloyd and other radicals found confirmation of their politics in traditions that could be traced over aeons.¹²⁹ These theorists were certainly not adverse to identifying the spirit of the dialectic in ancient songs. Thus the notion that all history is that of class struggle could be turned to radical interpretations of Pagan rituals and the identification of so-called 'Witch cults' as prototypical *political* cells. With competitive zeal born of a class-based chauvinism, the culture of the past was invoked to establish that the working class 'already had a culture of its own, and a

The Training of Critical Awareness, Chatto and Windus, London, 1933, p. 1.

¹²⁷ Robert Blatchford, 'Foreword' in (ed.), Georgia Pearce, The Clarion Songbook, The Clarion Press, London, (no date – possibly 1906), page v.

¹²⁸ Douglas Kennedy, 'On the Annual General Meeting', English Dance and Song, Vol. XXIII, No. 1, January 1959, p. 8. The essential, primitivism of dance was a consistent feature of Kennedy's rhetoric, he often wrote of the 'primordial dance spirit'. Douglas Kennedy, 'Folk Dance Revival', Folk Music Journal, Vol. 2, No. 2, 1971, pp. 80-90.

¹²⁹ In his Aeschylus and Athens (1941), George Thomson reads the poems of the Greeks for evidence of the dialectic, perhaps seeking to address Marx's own queries about why such apparently anachronistic cultural forms endure in modern times. Proselytising on behalf of folk to the CPGB, Lloyd suggested that the folk idiom was opposed to bourgeois music due to its utilitarian qualities. For most people, here and across the world, art was an absence and music was not about aesthetic pleasure but a necessity of life. It attended social rituals and work. A.L. Lloyd, 'Folk-Song for Our Time', Marxist Quarterly, No. 1, January 1954, p. 47.

culture much older and more vigorous than bourgeois culture, too'.¹³⁰ For Craig, the 'folk-mode' originated in a pre-capitalist society, it afforded insights into the people with 'their still semi-oral culture'.¹³¹ That these interpretations deal in a time scale extensive enough to be meaningless in relation to modern class formations is less important than the ultimate claim to authenticity for proletarian cultural forms and politics.

Importantly however, it was not just pre-industrial songs that were discussed as if they were objects that had some kind of intrinsic relationship with the natural world and the body. This notion, amongst others, has been repeated most recently in a BBC documentary series.¹³² Peggy Seeger recounted the bodily and mental 'weariness' felt by performers who attempted songs of 'alien' cultures, despite their enthusiasm for them. In this relationship of body and culture the validation of the oral becomes clear. Word-of-mouth, live performance, intimate contact - this was a tradition that was felt to be authentic, it was the *proper* way to treat folk song. There was even the suggestion that literacy and writing were individualist, bourgeois, capitalist *technologies* and should not be relied upon!¹³³

In this framework discussions of the relationship of culture and environment in Industrial Song appear in a suggestive light. On the issue of miners' songs, Lloyd wrote that their 'very melodies seemed to echo pit sounds and capture colliery smells, and to voice the hopes, fears and fancies of mining men'.¹³⁴ Likewise, in his

¹³⁰ Dallas, 'The Use of Folk Music in a Mass Musical Movement', p. 57.

¹³¹ David Craig, 'The New Poetry of Socialism', p. 75.

¹³² Interviewed in 'As I Roved Out' and more recently, 'Desert Island Discs', BBC Radio 4, *tx*, 8 July 2001.

¹³³ Pickering and Green have outlined the 'exaggeration' of the importance of orality in the revival.

Pickering and Green, 'Towards a Cartography of the Vernacular Milieu', p. 14.

¹³⁴ A.L.Lloyd, 'Folk-Songs of the Coalfields', *Coal - The NCB Magazine*, Vol.5, No.1, May 1951, p.

collection of songs The Shuttle and the Cage, MacColl advised the reader that: 'there are no nightingales in these songs, no flowers - and the sun is rarely mentioned; their themes are work, poverty, hunger and exploitation. They should be sung to the accompaniment of pneumatic drills and swinging hammers, they should be bawled above the hum of turbines and the clatter of looms, for they are songs of toil, anthems of the industrial age'.¹³⁵ Elsewhere, in a development of this thinking, it was suggested that the old rustic traditions and oral culture faltered in the shadows of new factories and mills. The pastoral and romantic disappeared; industrial songs were bitter, hard of heart and reflective of the extremities of modern life. New modes of production *demand*ed new philosophies and new modes of expression, 'A hybrid music that lived and breathed in the same way as its makers. A music suited to noise, dirt and inhumanity. Frequently poor in poetry and music it was rich in life. It mirrored the social attitude of the times far better than its countryside counterpart'.¹³⁶

A materialist analysis of the relationship of ideas, social organisation and culture to the economic basis of a historical milieu seems to me to be still a helpful way of understanding the world. However, what seems at work here is something far too simplistic and specific to be discounted as merely aesthetic rhetoric. The descriptions outlined above posit a highly reductive relation of culture to environment that does scant justice to the lives of those whose humanity and agency they seek to celebrate. The selectivity in operation here is compounded in one of Lloyd's discussions of miners, their work, communities and culture. He suggests

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¹³⁵ Quoted in Anon, 'Reviews', English Dance and Song, Vol. XIX, Aug-Sept 1954, p. 34.

that the job was treated as a 'sacred' calling, that there is less tension between work and personal life - that it still involves a physical contact between the man and the materials. Essentially in this celebration of labour, he is implying that mining is of a piece with pre-industrial work, that it is *not* 'alienated' in the Marxist sense. This provides some rationale for the presence of a strong creative tradition. As The Iron Muse reveals, the richest store of working-class culture came from the miners and the textile industries, trades with long established traditions. In comparison, newer industries - steel, the railways and so on - could be seen to be weak in poetry. A consequence of this distinction and the concentration on the radical culture of miners of the Northeast could, on occasion, imply that similar groups lacked authenticity. Celebrating the regular communal events at the Red Lion Pub in Birtley, Co. Durham, journalist David Bean described how the groups there sang naturally, roughly and spontaneously. Distinct from 'trained' miners choral groups in the Rhondda they sang about 'life as they know it; not as the choirmaster likes it'.¹³⁷

The arbitrariness of the selection here, based upon an overt political agenda, presumes to recognise the nature of an authentic and *essential* working class culture and tradition. Amongst the most politically committed of Revivalists, and indeed many who would not have considered themselves as such, this agenda guided the search and validation of historical material, as well as the ongoing production of folk that would serve to develop a 'proper' working class consciousness. At heart is a glaring contradiction. In the past lie examples of a genuine and robust culture that, despite succumbing to the social domination of commercial culture, offers a basis for

¹³⁶ Raven, The Urban and Industrial Songs of the Black Country and Birmingham, p. 2.

¹³⁷ David Bean, 'The Singing Miners', Coal Quarterly, Vol.1, No.5, Spring 1963, p. 7.

resistance, education and class solidarity. But the very idea of folk song as transparent reflection of a working-class experience and consciousness, in turn delivering a message to that community, is reductive and clearly flawed. Even if a song as text could be reduced to its lyrical content there is never any guarantee of its 'proper' use or reception.¹³⁸

I have suggested that the Revival offered a broad challenge to the hegemony of the EFDSS, which itself acknowledged the need for self-reflection regarding its exclusivity. Thus, a major concern for post-war folk enthusiasts was the claim to the constituency implied by the use of the term 'folk'. However, Tony Davis of the Spinners Club in Liverpool pointedly underlined the irony of the fact that 'While we sit here singing folksongs in our Folksong club, the folk are somewhere else - singing something different'.¹³⁹ It was acknowledged that 'those who partake can hardly be called either country, unlettered or particularly depressed folk'.¹⁴⁰ There were clear contradictions at work in the folk field and it was even suggested that the club culture of the scene was something of a failure. For one older writer the aim of collecting had always been 'to restore folk music to its place in the life of the common folk. The music should be an integral part of that life, not something to be set apart as rather special, and just for the esoteric clique'.¹⁴¹

Viewed in this way Boyes' suggestion that the English Folk Revival has succeeded is only partially convincing. Admittedly, song and dance became readily

¹³⁸ Harker and Watson especially have sought to validate folk song in this manner. For a precise discussion of the problems of interpreting song in this way see Frith, 'Why Do Songs Have Words?'

¹³⁹ Tony Davis, 'Folksong for the Folk', English Dance and Song, Vol. XXV, No.2, March 1962, p. 43.

¹⁴⁰ Anon, 'Folk Music in an Urban Society', English Dance and Song, Vol. XXVII, No.5, October 1965, p. 137.

¹⁴¹ Fred Raybold, Letter, 'Folk Post', Club Folk, Vol.1, No.5, July/August 1968, p. 3.

available in ways that they have not been in the past century. Folk wended into way into the field of education and its ideology had profound effects upon a variety of approaches to cultural projects. However, in terms of its total social project, pre- or post-war, Revivalism has *not* affected the rote of everyday life: as was its pronounced political aim and rationale. Clearly we are not about to embark upon the Socialist Millenium, yet to lay the blame for such things at the door of the Revival seems ridiculous. Rather, the issue is one of what these discourses tell us about the championing of working class culture, in the way that they construct and interpret working-class life *a priori*, in particular and inflexible ways.

Chapter Three.

Authenticity, Authority, and Democracy:

The Moment of 'Richard Hoggart' and The Uses of Literacy.

The classic reference points for the post-war concern with working-class culture as 'a key issue in our own time', and for how that story is told, are located in the work and figures of Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams.¹ For Williams, discussions asking 'what is working-class culture?' had been somewhat limited. Thinking of the kind of projects that I outline in Chapter One, he suggested that they were often politically sectarian or worn-out programmes for the development of the arts and their provision to a working class constituency.² Hoggart in The Uses of Literacy (1957) and Williams in his Culture and Society (1958) problematised the terms of the question itself, answering with the expanded definition: 'a whole way of life'.

Identified as writers *from* the working classes, theirs were works nurtured in psychic, intellectual and territorial borderlands, between working-classness and the identity of the academic intellectual; between the central point of the University and margins of adult education classes.³ Williams jocularly noted that his name was linked with Hoggart's so often that they came to sound like a joint-stock company. This has contributed to an ultimately inhibiting situation, persevering in what Paul

¹ Raymond Williams, Culture and Society 1780-1950, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1961 (first published 1958), p. 307.

² Raymond Williams, 'The Uses of Literacy: Working Class Culture', Universities and Left Review, No.2, Summer, 1957, p. 29. Both positions could inform the argument about culture, e.g. Communist Party of Great Britain, The British Road to Socialism, London, 1958.

³ It is customary to characterise them in this manner. See any of the surveys discussed below for evidence of the generic conventions involved in writing these histories.

Jones describes as 'The Myth of "Raymond Hoggart"', although in this relationship the latter has assumed junior status.⁴ Within the New Left circle that both helped initiate, it was Williams who was hoisted hero-like onto the team's shoulders, cheered as 'our best man'.⁵ As Stefan Collini has noted recently, 'for some time now it has been clear that Hoggart has not attracted anything like the degree of attention, still less reverence, accorded to Williams'.⁶

In more than iconoclastic spirit it is tempting to offer The Uses of Literacy in opposition to Williams' corpus as 'our best *book*'. In this respect Collini presents an elegant argument that Hoggart is the better writer of the two, Williams being 'relentlessly boring'.⁷ Recent work has proven productive in disentangling the two, and in this chapter I will concentrate on Hoggart's project.⁸ In the context of this thesis there are original things to say about The Uses of Literacy, its social and aesthetic aims, how it was read, and continues to be read, in relation to idealised concepts of working-class life. Likewise, Hoggart's writerly and humane insights have resonated in a range of thought and writing about the working classes, and how they have been imagined and represented.

The popular domain of Richard Hoggart and his book throws into relief the circumscribed narrative and epistemology into which they are usually placed and understood. It is a story structured primarily by a set of texts, a recognisable New Left canon. Herein, after the publication of The Uses of Literacy, the next significant

⁴ Paul Jones, 'The Myth of "Raymond Hoggart": On "Founding Fathers" and Cultural Policy', Cultural Studies, No.8, 1994, pp. 394- 416.

⁵ E.P. Thompson, 'The Long Revolution', New Left Review, No.9, May-June 1961, p. 24.

⁶ Stefan Collini, English Pasts: Essays in History and Culture, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 1999, p. 211.

⁷ Ibid., p. 221

⁸ E.g., Jones, 'The Myth of "Raymond Hoggart"', and also Francis Mulhern. 'A Welfare Culture?

event is marked by the launch of Universities and Left Review (1957), Culture and Society (1958), then perhaps New Left Review (1960). Other major landmarks are Williams' The Long Revolution (1961) and E.P. Thompson's The Making of the English Working Class (1963). With the publication of the latter the founding texts of a sub-plot of cultural studies were in place.⁹ Here, the work of the founding triumvirate of cultural studies marked the beginnings of a phase of engaged study that effectively ended with Policing the Crisis (1978), the triumphant ascendancy of the New Right, and the end of an era of 'consensus' politics, and perhaps of Welfare State culture.¹⁰ I use the term engaged here to characterise work that was conceived as commentary and intervention in politics, social policy and the conduct of the media. This engagement can be contrasted with the relativistic, market-lead material that constitutes contemporary cultural studies, that which 'leaves no room for politics beyond cultural practice, or for political solidarities beyond the particularisms of cultural difference'.¹¹

Recently, others have delved deep into this cultural studies narrative to explore the wider context of its origins in Adult Education and the work of the

Hoggart and Williams in the Fifties', Radical Philosophy, No.77, May/June 1996.

⁹ Although seemingly infinite, a randomly representative list where that story can be found includes Simon During (ed.), 'Introduction' in The Cultural Studies Reader, Routledge, London and New York, 1993; John Storey, An Introduction to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture (Second Edition), Harvester Wheatsheaf, Hemel Hemstead, 1997 (first published 1993); Jessica Munns and Gita Rajan (eds), A Cultural Studies Reader: History, Theory, Practice, Longman, London and New York 1995 and Chris Barker, Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice, Sage, London, 2000.

¹⁰ S. Hall; C. Critcher; T. Jefferson, Clarke, J., and B. Roberts, Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order, Macmillan, London, 1978; as discussed by Dennis Dworkin, Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain: History, the New Left, and the Origins of Cultural Studies, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 1997, pp. 246 ff.

¹¹ Francis Mulhern, 'The Politics of Cultural Studies', in Ellen Meiksins Wood and John Bellamy Foster (eds), In Defense of History: Marxism and the Postmodern Agenda, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1997, p. 50. For an elegant expression of this point see also Terry Eagleton, The Idea of Culture, Blackwell, Oxford, 2000, particularly Chapter 2, pp. 32-50. See also Sally Munt 'Introduction', and Andy Medhurst, 'If Anywhere: Class Identification and Cultural Studies

Workers' Educational Association (WEA).¹² Such histories need qualifying by questions that ask where else were cultural issues raised, what kind of currency did they have and to whom were they important? After all, it is salutary to recall that Universities and Left Review, at best, sold about 8000 copies of each issue; its precursor New Reasoner, another touchstone in this narrative, sold only 3000.¹³

Hoggart's importance is underlined by comments from that doyen of the New Left, Perry Anderson. In 1968, against the backdrop of *les événements*, he reflected on the manner in which questions of 'culture' had offered genuine and important insights into British society. In retrospect, and despite the massive contribution of Williams to socialist thinking, he suggested instead that the context in which the New Left had been formed could be described as 'the moment of Richard Hoggart's *Uses of Literacy*'.¹⁴ Despite making similar assertions about the importance and inspirational place of the book in the story of the New Left, both Dennis Dworkin and Lin Chunn are typical in paying it brief attention. Chunn properly locates it within a Leavisite tradition, suggesting that it is a worrying-at the cultural degeneration effected by mass communications. In a departure from that tradition however, it constituted neither celebration of high culture nor nostalgia for the pre-industrial organic community but 'an elegy for a genuine working-class

Academics' in Sally R. Munt (ed.), Cultural Studies and the Working Class, Cassell, London and New York, 2000, pp. 5-6 and 21.

¹² Robert Hewison, Culture and Consensus: England, Art and Politics since 1940, Methuen, London, 1997. Most recently Tom Steele, The Emergence of Cultural Studies: Cultural Politics, Adult Education and the English Question, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1997 which despite its archaeological approach offers little consideration of Hoggart's most enduring work.

¹³ See 'Editorial: ULR to New Left Review', Universities and New Left Review, No.7, Autumn 1959, pp. 1-2.

¹⁴ Perry Anderson, 'Components of the National Culture', New Left Review, No.50, July-August 1968, p. 5.

culture'.¹⁵ In this lies the perceived limit of the work, dealing as it does with an archaic idea of the working class derived from Hoggart's memory of the inter-war years. Its profound truths are located in an analysis of social change and, apparently, 'the decline of class consciousness'. It is directed by an indeterminate methodology and in excluding coverage of the Labour movement is 'far from sufficient as a socialist analysis'.¹⁶

Essentially descriptive and personal in tone, The Uses of Literacy became a poor relation to the heroic project of the Left and an ultimately idealistic body of theoretically-driven research in pursuit of an adequately radical working-class object. In any telling of this committed story, it is quickly - perhaps embarrassingly - shunted aside in favour of the developing work of Williams, Thompson and latterly, Perry Anderson and Terry Eagleton, et al.¹⁷ Deeply flawed perhaps, Hoggart's book nonetheless offers much by way of insights into particular ways of thinking about the working classes and working-class consciousness in post-war Britain.

The Uses of Literacy was published by Chatto and Windus in hardback in February 1957. An enormous and culturally pervasive success, it was reprinted four times in the next year, issued as a Pelican paperback in 1958 and has never been out of print since. Teaching in the USA at the time of publication, the author attained a certain celebrity in his absence. Although bemused by his elevation, his subsequent ubiquity and weight as a commentator on working class manners and the media in

¹⁵ Lin Chunn, The British New Left, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1993, p. 36.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 37.

¹⁷ Within the cultural studies narrative it has been suggested that relatively little work was built upon it at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) which was founded by Hoggart himself. See 'Preface' in John Clarke, Chas Critcher and Richard Johnson (eds), Working Class Culture: Studies in History and Theory, Hutchinson, London, 1979, p. 7. Also, Janet Batsleer, Tony Davies, Rebecca O'Rourke and Chris Weedon, Rewriting English: Cultural Politics of Gender and Class,

general was such that the satirists of Punch numbered him among 'The Pundits', i.e. 'private citizens who lay down the law'.¹⁸

At his first actual meeting with Williams, Hoggart recalled the gestation of his book, its fragmentary impulses suggesting something of its singular character. Beginning in 1952 the author was thinking then,

of something quite simple in scope and size - a series of critical essays on popular literature. Soon I began to feel that I wanted to relate this material to the day-to-day experience of people. After this, a strange thing happened ... things I'd been writing since 1946 (bits of a novel and some unconnected descriptive pieces) began to fall into place in the new book.¹⁹

His earliest non-specialist writing had appeared immediately after the war in the Labour Party periodical Tribune under the patronage of its then literary editor T.R. Fyvel. Socio-cultural pieces in Orwellian vein, these were the formative sketches towards the later work. Its working title was The Abuses of Literacy, and its themes were trailed to a sizeable audience when, in 1955, he was invited to give a series of talks on national radio. Three twenty-minute programmes were transmitted on successive Wednesdays at 10.00pm, under the general title of 'Changing Values'. They appeared on the BBC's Home Service, rather than the more elitist and restricted Third Programme.²⁰ 'Tradition and Resistance' (tx: 14 April 1955),

Methuen, London, 1985, p. 3.

¹⁸ Bernard Bergonzi, 'The Pundits', Punch, 29 April 1964, Vol. CCXLVI, No. 6451, pp. 622-4.

¹⁹ Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams, 'Working Class Attitudes', New Left Review, No.1, January 1960, p. 26. Until that point they knew of each other through the WEA and had exchanged letters. A published exchange occurred as early as 1948, see Richard Hoggart, 'Some Notes on Aim and Method in University Tutorial Classes', Adult Education, Vol. XX, No.4, June 1948, pp. 187-94 and Raymond Williams, 'A Note on Mr Hoggart's Appendices', Adult Education, Vol. XXI, No.2, 1948, pp. 96-8.

²⁰ A small but important point - Tom Steele, misreading Hoggart's autobiography, suggests that the

'Unbent Springs' (tx 27 April 1955) and 'Present Trends' (tx 4 May 1955) were enough of a success for the author to be invited back several months later when he talked about 'The Scholarship Boy' (tx 1955).

Upon publication of the book the challenge of the original title had been muted, the *abusive* syllable removed. Somewhat schizophrenic in organisation, in its first part it presented a detailed and personal portrait of working-class life the reference point for which was the author's own childhood experience. Equally personal, the second part offered analyses of the kind of popular reading matter then available: cheap magazines and literature characterised by the 'sex and violence' novel. The aim of this structure was to underline the central thesis: 'that we are moving towards the creation of a mass culture; that the remnants of what was at least in parts an urban culture "of the people" are being destroyed; and that the new mass culture is in some important ways less healthy than the often crude culture it is replacing'.²¹

Reviews were abundant and generally appreciative, praise for the first part in particular generally outweighed negative criticisms of the overall thesis. The indeterminate status of the book's approach (was it sociology, history or literary criticism?), facilitated its reception in an estimable variety of destinations. Hoggart was praised for his 'moral ingenuousness'.²² He was placed firmly in that line of thinkers concerned with education and culture. Alongside De Tocqueville, J.S. Mill, Arnold, Newman and Leavis (a lineage demarcated in the book itself by quotation

pieces were written for 'the sophisticated middle-class audience of the BBC's Third Programme' (*The Emergence of Cultural Studies*, 1997, p. 137). Evidently, they were not.

²¹ Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working Class life, With Special Reference to Publications and Entertainments*, Chatto and Windus, London, 1962 (first published 1957), p. 24.

and citation), he was lauded as a 'modern Mayhew'. Despite such precedents the book was felt to be highly original in approach and organisation, WEA veteran Asa Briggs described it as being 'quite out of the ordinary'.²³ Putting flesh on the bones of sociological studies it indicated 'universal truths in the particular'.²⁴ It provided 'A modest sense of the ordinary life of man'.²⁵ Despite the 'serious underestimation' of the work of the 'earnest minority', and a failure to pinpoint the USA as a serious source of socio-cultural degradation, even the Daily Worker was generous in its praise.²⁶ So valuable was it felt to be by the Manchester Guardian that it ran its review as an editorial column.²⁷ Some sociologists warmed to its 'complete intellectual honesty', although there were immediate reservations about its definitions, methodology and guiding assumptions.²⁸ In this the author could be seen as typical of those pessimistic modern intellectuals (Mill, Arnold, Leavis, et al.), 'who, since the French Revolution have warned us of the coming of mass man and mass culture'.²⁹ This is a useful observation, but it is Hoggart's precise inflection on this tradition and departure from its terms that aid an understanding of the impact of the book as something quite new in tone and aspiration.

The Uses of Literacy was, above all, a timely book. Analogous to the Victorian relationship with sex, responses to it reveal a remarkable ambivalence

²² Anon, 'Admass Culture', Times Literary Supplement, No.2869, 22 February 1957, p. 110

²³ Asa Briggs, 'Mass Culture', Social Service Quarterly, Vol.XXXI, No.1, June-August 1957, pp. 6-9. A WEA colleague of Hoggart's, Briggs is acknowledged in the book itself.

²⁴ J.M. Cameron, 'Massacre of the Innocent: A Study in Working-Class Culture', The Month (New Series). Vol.17, No.6, June 1957, p. 388.

²⁵ Eliot Freidson, (Review Article) 'The Uses of Literacy: The Changing Patterns in English Mass Culture', American Journal of Sociology, Vol. LXIV, No.1, July 1958, p. 97.

²⁶ Bert Baker, 'Is it True that Britain is Becoming a Candy-Floss World?', Daily Worker, 5 March 1957, p. 2.

²⁷ 'Cultural Erosion', Manchester Guardian, 23 February 1957, p. 6.

²⁸ Asher Tropp, 'Review of The Uses of Literacy', American Sociological Review, Vol.23, No.2, April 1958, p. 221.

about the discussion of class in Britain at that moment. Attributable to contemporary descriptions of embourgeoisement, consumerism and the egalitarianism engendered by the Welfare State, it was possible to conclude that 'Our age is obsessed with class'.³⁰ Yet in relation, the term 'working-class' was found to be increasingly difficult to define and even 'embarrassing to use'.³¹ The surprise and fascinated delight that the book met with indicated something of deep social divisions of the nation. Often, Hoggart's 'Hunslett' represented a milieu that the some might only have glimpsed in passing, say 'from the window of a northern train': 'To many in other classes ... these streets are not where people really live; their existence is soon forgotten, and in the imagination they make way again for the comforting image of the eternal archetype of the British working-class, thought of as somehow quite distinct from the slums which nurture him'.³² Discourses of affluence and political consensus elided this physical and cultural distance as well as the nature of abiding injustices, and what Hoggart called 'The very absence of shared values in Great Britain'.³³

Hoggart's politics were seeded and cultivated in the slums of Leeds and at its University under the tutelage of Bonamy Dobrée. A 'once-born socialist', his passionate democratic outlook was further nurtured by his wartime experiences,

²⁹ Tropp, 'Review of The Uses of Literacy', p. 221.

³⁰ Anon, 'English Common Man', The Times Educational Supplement, No. 2181, 8 March 1957, p. 298.

³¹ M.M. Lewis, 'Review of The Uses of Literacy', British Journal of Educational Studies, Vol.VI, No.1, November 1957, p. 82.

³² Anon, 'English Common Man', p. 298. The allusion here is to the opening chapter of George Orwell's Road to Wigan Pier (1937). Hoggart provided a preface for a later edition (Heinemann, London, 1965).

³³ N. Birnbaum, 'Monarchs and Sociologists', Sociological Review, Vol.3 (New Series), No.1, 1955, p. 19.

work with ABCA, and subsequently as a tutor in the field of Adult Education.³⁴ From such roots and in its context The Uses of Literacy can be understood as a complex and conscious response to contemporary social trends in two ways. Firstly, this was an intervention on behalf of a still largely polarised society that he described as 'a Britain which has not yet learned to speak seriously to its new self'.³⁵ That the nation, especially the hitherto disenfranchised majority, was heading to something *better* he had no doubt. He was clear enough in his praise for the real economic achievements that had been made in alleviating the strain of working class existence; modern materialism was undoubtedly 'a way of keeping decent'.³⁶ As a consequence, the idea that the future might, in some way, be described as 'classless' could be appreciated, yet such descriptions implied a number of value judgements tending to reinforce persistent social prejudices. It meant an unchallenged assumption that society was adopting and would be defined by 'aspirant lower-middle-class attitudes'. For working people this meant the prospect of a move from a culture of 'sticking together' to one of acquisitiveness, envy and 'at base a bland levelling of society, sapping its traditional vitality to the standard of 'imaginative boiled milk'.³⁷ It also implied that working-class traditions were transient and worthless - something to be sloughed off at the offer of better wages and a 'telly' on the H.P. Hoggart's book was not therefore a document seeking to detail a disappearing culture for the benefit of posterity, but an attempt to underline its

³⁴ Richard Hoggart, A Sort of Clowning: Life and Times Volume 2, 1940-59, Chatto and Windus, London, 1991.

³⁵ Richard Hoggart, 'Speaking to Each Other' in Norman MacKenzie (ed.), Conviction, MacGibbon and Kee, London, 1958, p. 121. This work can be considered as a useful addendum to The Uses of Literacy, clarifying the author's intention. Raymond Williams' 'Culture is Ordinary' in the same collection has a similar relationship with Culture and Society.

³⁶ Hoggart, The Uses of Literacy, p. 172.

positive values - historical *and* contemporary. The new society, if it could be legislated for, guided and *planned* by moral imperatives - other than the profit motive - should draw upon 'the strengths in our traditional and homogenous class-groups', whether upper or working class.³⁸

Hoggart, and Williams too, were acutely aware of the ways in which definitions of culture were enlisted to bolster older social inequalities and anti-democratic impulses, however obliquely expressed. Anticipating the post-war settlement, Harold Nicolson, diplomat and member of the Bloomsbury set of aesthetes, resigned himself to what he termed 'a Woolworth life'.³⁹ For other 'men of culture' however, the egalitarian injunction was a less than welcoming prospect. Most notoriously T.S. Eliot wrote that the 'aim to make everyone share in the appreciation of the fruits of the more conscious part of culture is to adulterate and cheapen what you give. For it is an essential condition of the preservation of the quality of the culture of the minority, that it should continue to be a minority culture'.⁴⁰ In highbrow journals like *Encounter* one could regularly detect the nature of prevailing assumptions and fears implied in Eliot's warning that 'a "mass-culture" will always be a substitute culture'.⁴¹ 'Almost *everybody*' (my emphasis), it was suggested, was worried about the 'extension of the frontiers of the vulgar, the corrupt, and the trivial'.⁴² In competition and contrast with high culture, the trepidation *everybody* felt about its 'mass' counterpart was warranted in 'such

³⁷ Hoggart, 'Speaking to Each Other', p. 123.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

³⁹ Harold Nicolson, *Diaries and Letters 1939-62*, 28 April 1947, 1968.

⁴⁰ T.S. Eliot, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, Faber and Faber, London, 1972 (first published 1948) pp. 106-107.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

⁴² Dwight MacDonald, 'A Corrupt Brightness' in *Encounter*, Vol.VIII. No.6, June 1957, p. 75.

political growths as Hitler's demagogy, the Communist's "people's democracies" and the "Americanisation" of Europe'.⁴³ At danger from such developments – but also to blame for them - was a majority understood to be an indiscriminating and passive herd, in the words of Ortega y Gasset 'simply without morality'.⁴⁴

This is where Hoggart's second level of engagement can be understood. He suggested that such fears of the people, if they *ever* obtained, were now irrelevant, the result of treating 'working-class people as almost blank slates'.⁴⁵ Conclusions based upon a construction of 'mass man' were 'untrue of him as an individual living a life which has some recognizable meaning to him'.⁴⁶ It was his aim to reveal and validate that meaning, the dimensions of which are gauged in the attempt to answer the book's instructive and guiding question 'Who Are "The Working Classes"?'. Here, in painterly manner, one is presented with a 'Landscape with Figures', a "Real" World of *People* who live 'The Full Rich Life' according to 'An "Older" Order'.

Hoggart makes a constant distinction between the perceptions of those who view this world from *without* and those who have made this life something of value from *within*. As he observed: 'To a visitor they are understandably depressing, these massed proletarian areas; street after regular street of shoddily uniform houses ... a dark pattern of ginnels and snickets ... a study in shades of dirty-grey, without greenness or the blueness of sky'.⁴⁷ But to the *insider* however, these could be

⁴³ MacDonald, 'A Corrupt Brightness', p. 75.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, p. 241. A useful summary of the origins of ideas about 'the masses' is Michael Tranter, *Modernism and Mass Politics: Joyce, Woolf, Eliot, Yeats*, Stanford University Press, Stanford Ca., 1995. See p. 21 ff.

⁴⁵ Hoggart, 'Speaking to Each Other', p. 132.

⁴⁶ Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, p. 275.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

imagined as small worlds, 'each as homogeneous and well-defined as a village'.⁴⁸ Carolyn Steedman has pointed to the limitations of this portrait, that in Hoggart's account also 'The streets are all the same; nothing changes'.⁴⁹ For her, the result is an ascription of a psychological simplicity to the lives lived out in this place. This is perhaps due to some of the unresolved tensions of his book, but I suggest instead that the reader *is* presented with a milieu in which a life of some depth *can* be lived out. 'Complex and active', this life maintains 'a peculiarly gripping wholeness'.⁵⁰ In fact, in his prolegomenon Hoggart bemoans those sociologies that enlist a wealth of data that presents a world 'all of it different and yet all of it similar'.⁵¹ For him working-class life *is* sprawling, multitudinous, detailed *and* seemingly depressingly uniform. 'I think such an impression is wrong', he adds, with the proviso that 'if only because it builds an image of working-class life from statistics, a counting of how many say and do this or that'. The ambiguities of such portraits, right *and* wrong lie in a failure to interpret, 'to see beyond the habits to what the habits stand for ... to detect the differing pressures of emotion behind idiomatic phrases and ritualistic observances'.⁵²

Underwritten by a careful intention to eschew sentiment and idealism is the implication that in The Uses of Literacy what is on offer is the *real* working class. Those who had hitherto denigrated, pitied or romanticised the working classes were revealed to be without 'an adequate sense of the grass-roots of that life'.⁵³ *Ipso facto*,

⁴⁸ Hoggart, The Uses of Literacy, p. 59.

⁴⁹ Carolyn Steedman, Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives, Virago, London, 1986, p. 11.

⁵⁰ Hoggart, The Uses of Literacy, p. 63 and 68.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 16.

⁵² Ibid., p. 17.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 16.

those who came *from* the working classes were not liable to sentimentalise that world.⁵⁴ Thus, Hoggart's insistence that he recognised and was able to discriminate between real and inauthentic working-classness was founded upon little more than the authority of his social credentials: 'I am from the working-classes and feel even now both close to them and apart from them'.⁵⁵ Similarly, evaluations of his insights and the truth of his portrait were authorised in the same manner. Briggs wrote that 'I know myself at first hand the world Mr. Hoggart is describing and I can vouch for the authenticity of his comments'.⁵⁶ D.J. Enright, who could also claim similar roots to Hoggart, celebrated the detail of the book as 'no mere daub in black and white: his palette is rich in shades of colour'.⁵⁷ It resonated because it was written from *within*, rather than '*de haut en bas*'. Such was Hoggart's fidelity to milieu that Enright warned that the first part at least would bring a lump to the collective throat of a certain body of readers. What was it, he asked, that kept '*us*' going, though moments of self-loathing and in the hurt directed at family and self in the single-minded struggle for scholarships and self-improvement?⁵⁸ Enright also compared Hoggart's work with D.H. Lawrence's autobiographical novel Sons and Lovers (1913), which has been described as 'perhaps the first ... with a truly working-class background'.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ In this way his 'unsentimental' approach compared with that of A.L. Rowse in A Cornish Childhood (1942), as discussed by G.R. Grasby, 'Can an Industrial Society be Civilized?', Education for Teaching (Formerly The Bulletin of Education), No.45, February 1958, pp. 40-42. For an interesting anecdote on the sentimental view of the working class, see Raymond Williams, Politics and Letters, New Left Books, London, p. 67.

⁵⁵ Hoggart, The Uses of Literacy, p. 17.

⁵⁶ Asa Briggs, 'Mass Culture', p. 7.

⁵⁷ D.J. Enright, 'Review of The Uses of Literacy', Twentieth Century, Vol.161. No.962, April 1957, p. 407. Enright (1920-), academic, poet, novelist, was born of working-class parents in Leamington Spa. Studied at Downing College under F.R. Leavis. See William Walsh, D.J. Enright: Poet of Humanism, Cambridge University Press, 1974.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 408.

⁵⁹ Margaret Drabble and Jenny Stringer, The Concise Oxford Companion to English Literature, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1991, p. 528.

Paul Morel, Lawrence's protagonist, is a sensitive, creative young man with aspirations nurtured by his mother and that cause him to look beyond the mining community of Bestwood in search of 'life'. To some degree then, The Uses of Literacy bore the hallmarks of a minor literary genre.⁶⁰ This suggested the way in which it might be read and recognised, particularly by those whose experience it spoke to directly, but also how *they* might understand and reproduce its terms in their own narratives.

Despite his own immersion in high culture and its appreciation, Hoggart found working-class culture to have qualities that were unrecognised by educational imperatives and which compared favourably with traditional assumptions about the endowments bestowed by High Culture. He described an accretion of elements that 'add up to a life of such texture and body that most of our assessments and missionary efforts seem thin and drab by comparison'.⁶¹ The particular reference point for his thinking and the organisation of the book was of course the work of the Leavises at Cambridge University, and the journal Scrutiny. And it was the Leavises who were, in part, responsible for the cultivation of a particular discourse about the nature of contemporary life and an audience receptive to such arguments.⁶² However, and as we have seen, it was their thinking that had also contributed to anti-democratic and elitist descriptions of culture.

In Fiction and the Reading Public (1932) Q.D.Leavis had offered her own construction of 'mass man', expressing nostalgia for a time when the majority were

⁶⁰ Other examples of this genre include, Richard Llewellyn's How Green Was My Valley (1939) and Howard Spring's Fame is the Spur (1940).

⁶¹ Hoggart, 'Speaking to Each Other', p. 133.

⁶² As argued by W. Walsh, 'Leavis's Truth of Resistance', New Statesman, Vol. LIX, No.1515, 23

acquiescent in their 'unquestioning assent to authority'.⁶³ It has been suggested that her pessimistic conclusions about modern habits were made from afar, in the manner of an 'old-style colonialist ethnographer staring with distaste at the barbaric ways of strange and unknown people'.⁶⁴ Frank Leavis echoed T.S. Eliot's position in his Education and the University (1943), arguing for the establishment of an intellectual élite who would preserve the essence of English life and culture, threatened as it was by the mass media, technology and consumerism. Thus, for WEA tutor J.F.C. Harrison, Hoggart's technique coupled with his politics and empathy offered a useful corrective to such perspectives. The Uses of Literacy served to modify a too-exclusively middle-class intellectual outlook on popular reading habits.⁶⁵ I think that a key insight into Hoggart's conscious impulse is indicated in his recent description of the work of the WEA itself as 'The Great Tradition'.⁶⁶ Leavis' book of the same name presents a circumscribed and ossified canon of literary greats whereas Hoggart's appropriation of the title celebrates something of an active, democratic process of cultural transmission, engagement and exchange.

Francis Mulhern identifies the central thesis of Leavis and the Cambridge School as 'community'. As a 'posited historic fact' of proper social organisation, in

March 1960, pp. 454-6.

⁶³ Q.D. Leavis, Fiction and the Reading Public, London, Chatto and Windus, 1978 (first published 1932), p. 191.

⁶⁴ John Docker, Postmodernism and Popular Culture: A Cultural History, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994, p. 25.

⁶⁵ JFC Harrison, 'Mass Culture and Anarchy', New Statesman, Vol. LIII, No.1355, 2 March 1957, pp. 283-4. Responding to Harrison's review F.R. Leavis suggested that Fiction and the Reading Public had done exactly that which was claimed for Hoggart's book. He questioned whether Hoggart 'corrected' the middle-class outlook of the 'pioneers' on the basis that such descriptions had no meaning. F.R. Leavis, 'The Uses of Literacy' (Letter), New Statesman, Vol.LIII, No.1356, 9 March 1957, pp. 309-10. Harrison has recently published his memoir of his lower middle-class upbringing, its generic status clearly signaled in the title: Scholarship Boy: A Personal History of the Mid-Twentieth Century, Rivers Oram Press, London, 1995.

⁶⁶ Hoggart, A Sort of Clowning, p. 94.

one form or another it informed a variety of work as 'the premise of analysis, the remedial means and the ultimate goal'.⁶⁷ Close to nature and its rhythms, born of 'immemorial experience', Leavis's idea of community is nonetheless an *ahistorical* concept. In part, this is an idea that Hoggart imports to the urban slum which, as noted above, he compared favourably with 'the village'.⁶⁸ The rural touchstone is instructive, yet only inasmuch as it underlines his departure from it; elsewhere he delineates the rural lineage of his family although not in order to appeal to a pastoral nostalgia. On the contrary, he insists that from the moment of their migration they had been 'fully of the towns' and conversant with urban life, its structures and mechanics.

Bernard Bergonzi points out that in his written work and public pronouncements, Hoggart made do with 'extraordinarily few ideas'. Instead, 'he leans very heavily on the phrase "quality of life", which is something of a Leavisian (sic) stock response'.⁶⁹ In whatever ways this phrase has been deployed it has actually had little to do with the corporeal - enough food, fresh air, freedom from labour or physical pleasure for instance - that have made people feel adequately human. Instead, and in relation to the organic community, that quality is understood through 'an art of life, a way of living, ordered and patterned, involving social arts, codes of intercourse and a responsive adjustment'.⁷⁰ It connotes something spiritual and intellectual, pertaining to an aesthetic sensibility and cultural discrimination. The

⁶⁷ Francis Mulhern, The Moment of 'Scrutiny', New Left Books, London, 1979, p.309.

⁶⁸ Compare this with the pastoral lineage described and celebrated for its authenticity in Jeremy Seabrook, The Unprivileged: A Hundred Years of Family Life and Tradition in a Working-Class Street, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1973, p. 53 ff.

⁶⁹ Bergonzi, 'The Pundits', p. 624.

⁷⁰ F.R. Leavis and Denys Thompson, Culture and Environment: The Training of Critical Awareness, Chatto and Windus, London, 1959 (first published 1933), p. 1.

key contribution and extension of this idea offered by Hoggart was his ascription of such qualities to contemporary working-class life. For him it could be characterised by a 'fineness of discrimination' - towards one's peers, the world and the pleasures of the 'mass' media, usually seen as the index of degradation.⁷¹ In the absence of an archaic tradition of folk music or crafts, working class responses to life and expressions were examined in relation to the canonisation of popular songs, for instance. It is important here to understand that Hoggart is not suggesting that 'mass culture' is in some way synonymous with working-class culture *per se*, but echoes and is invested with its recognisable qualities – many of which were shared by other classes. This is, I think, a useful insight that does not present the commercial media at a remove from that life, somehow unconnected to it yet effective in its attractions, as an inscrutable and manipulating machine designed as part of an ideological conspiracy.

Instead of judging them on values imported from outside their world, Hoggart sought to understand how ordinary people made use of the resources available to them within it. Thus, popular songs may have appeared to be imaginatively poor - conventional too - yet 'their aim if to present to the hearer as directly as possible a known patter of emotions; they are not so much creations in their own right as structures of conventional signs for the emotional fields they open'.⁷² These are appropriated on the terms of the people themselves who ignore much yet 'make much else better than it really is, to continue putting their own kind

⁷¹ Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, p. 87.

⁷² *Ibid*, p. 161.

of vision into what may not really deserve it'.⁷³ While such material lacks the finesse of the popular culture of Elizabethan England (a possible locus for the Leavisite organic community), if the peasants of that era were capable of a fineness of response, 'is it not also worthy of remark that working-class audiences today, after nearly one hundred years of hard and often ugly urban life, should hold as strongly as they do to themes which, though very simply apprehended, are by no means unadmirable?'⁷⁴

Apparent here then are some of the unworkable contradictions of The Uses of Literacy, torn as it is between optimism and pessimism in its description of this working-class sensibility. Having provided a detailed picture of humanity for all those theorists who would reduce working class identity and individuality to an aggregate psychology, Hoggart warned of the modern media's 'probable effects', and its propensity to achieve just that.⁷⁵ What is on offer in this commercial world, he suggested, is the inculcation of an already out-dated concept of progress located in a 'largely material outlook', which is not the *necessary* consequence of recent gains of real value in people's lives.⁷⁶ What resulted were appeals to a spurious individualism in which positive group attributes become disarmed, serving 'a callow democratic egalitarianism'.⁷⁷ This is based upon 'the well-known cant of "the common man"', nothing more than a flattering construction of the media.⁷⁸ In this analysis, ordinariness is deified along lines actually *denying* and deploring the difference and individuality that Hoggart insisted were characteristic of working-

⁷³ Hoggart, The Uses of Literacy, p. 325.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 162.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 170.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 183.

class existence: 'from giving a proper sense of self-respect, "Ah'm as good as you" can turn into the surly "Yer no better than me", which is the harsh ass-cry of the philistine in his straw, who will tolerate no suggestion of a challenge or awkward example. It can become a cocksure refusal to recognize any sort of differentiation, whether of brains or character'.⁷⁹ Thus, while Hoggart's central argument might appear to be advancing a curiously relativistic idea of culture, it is also informed by an appreciation of difference based upon ability, intelligence and strength of personality. Nonetheless, in the face of the onslaught upon them, working class people 'still possess some older and inner resistances'.⁸⁰ These qualities offer the possibility of maintaining an integrity that could indeed be considered to be somewhat static and ahistorical, certainly irreconcilable with 'the shallower aspects of modernity'.⁸¹

Consistent with an attack on the construction of 'the masses' by unsympathetic conservative intellectuals and advertising copywriters is a critique of those of the Left. Arguing against 'the common man' as a trope of cheap entertainment means opposing him when pitched at the other extreme as 'proletarian man'. In his repeated cautioning against romanticising and pitying the working classes, Hoggart describes the 'over-expectation which one frequently finds among middle-class intellectuals with strong social consciences'.⁸² There are those for whom every other working class *man* is a Felix Holt or Jude the Obscure. Such fictional types have their real-life counterparts and are regularly encountered by

⁷⁷ Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, p. 178.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

committed intellectuals yet constitute a *minority*. They are important, 'as individuals', exceptional but 'untypical' as representatives of a class. The problem for Hoggart is that the minority have been mistaken for the central and defining *fact* of working-classness. Consequently, while there are those who lionise 'the upright workers', alternately there are those others that 'some trade union leaders, when they are regretting a lack of interest in their movements, call "the vast apathetic mass"'.⁸³ At issue was the question of which of these two groups could be thought of as embodying the authentic *essence* of the working class and its cultural identity.

Based upon these terms, one of the first readers to pass appreciative, if negative comment on the book was a colleague of Hoggart's at the University of Hull. A sociologist of art, Marxist theoretician and CPGB member, F.D. Klingender's reactions presaged the perception of the limited 'political' value of The Uses of Literacy. Troubled by the lack of attention to the workplace and absence of political activity in this version of working-class life, he was 'uncompromisingly hard' in his reaction to it, feeling a challenge to his ideas.⁸⁴ E.P. Thompson described work and politics as proper 'adult pre-occupations', as if some of the other concerns outlined by Hoggart – sex, death and pleasure, for instance – were not.⁸⁵ Allied to this kind of criticism of course was the suspicion of the book's emphasis on what might be described as a highly *feminised* environment and set of concerns. The figure of 'The Father' was secondary to the portrait of the working-class mother, where the axis of hardship and deprivation is traced and felt most keenly.

⁸¹ Hoggart, The Uses of Literacy, p. 192.

⁸² Ibid., p. 115.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 22.

⁸⁴ Hoggart, A Sort of Clowning, p. 142. For Klingender's approach see his Art and the Industrial

Seen from within a Marxist epistemology the evidence for a failure of political analysis is prodigious. Obvious objections lay in Hoggart's conclusion that community, solidarity and sticking together, 'does not develop into a conscious sense of being part of "the working-class movement": the Co-op's are today less typical of the outlook of the majority in the working-classes than the small privately-owned corner-shops serving a couple of streets'.⁸⁶ In this account, attitudes to political matters are dictated by a 'limited realism', the result of a lack of interest in or appreciation of abstraction.⁸⁷ Life is moral but without metaphysical rationale. For Hoggart, working class attitudes express the feeling of being subject to life as a series of successive events outside one's influence.⁸⁸ In his portrait of 'Mother' for instance, he is careful in avoiding a sense of heroic glamour, finding no *uncommon* drama in her and thus no voyeuristic spectacle. Misery, and sorrow are her lot – words that are descriptions of the consistent quality of everyday life, 'regular words' to describe such a life. The result is not resentment, despair or disappointment but the adoption of *suitable* ways of living a liveable life, without a 'theory' or sense of the larger picture; it is self-defence against humiliation. This is 'the strong traditional urge to make life intensely human, to humanize it in spite of everything and so to make it not simply bearable, but positively interesting'.⁸⁹ Thus, the useful

Revolution, Noel Carrington, London, 1947.

⁸⁵ E.P. Thompson, 'Commitment in Politics', *Universities and Left Review*, No.6, Spring 1959, p. 54.

⁸⁶ Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, p. 82

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p. 104

⁸⁸ 'Working-class life has long been dominated by the thisness of things and events and people; an unordered thisness'. Hoggart, *A Sort of Clowning*, p. 213.

⁸⁹ Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, p. 105.

manicheism of 'Us' and 'Them', and the sense that the essence of working-class life lies in the concrete, stressing intimacy, the evidence of the senses and the personal.⁹⁰

Thompson suggested that a remedy for the deficiencies of Hoggart's book and its effects would be to 'discuss the uses of literacy a little less, and the uses of history rather more'. For him the book was *ahistorical* because it failed to recognise something far more organised and consistent about working class life. A *proper* sense of history illuminated how the working class developed 'consciousness of itself'. In turn, a proper historical sense - of injustice, radical traditions and ideas - would instil in it, a 'knowledge of its own potential strength'.⁹¹ The terms of Thompson's critique had an abiding power, informing a succession of rejections of Hoggart's work for its 'superficial' analysis. Instead of appreciating his insights it became possible to ask therefore 'In what way ... is Hoggart's notion of a genuine culture of the "people" a caricature or an *accurate* portrait of working-class culture?'⁹² The problem for Marxists was not that, despite his prudence, he romanticised working class culture, but that he failed to romanticise it in the *correct* manner.

A useful response to Thompson's critique would be to problematise the fundamental concept here and ask what *is* history, who defines it and whose interests does it serve? The value of Hoggart's insights seem to me to lie exactly in the description of the contingency of working-class life, and the consciousness of *that* fact, which itself raises questions about the nature of the historian's sometimes unquestioned concepts. Of course, while a sense of history and political power might

⁹⁰ Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, p. 102-4

⁹¹ Thompson, 'Commitment in Politics', p. 54.

have value, contributing to a collective sense of worth, ability and possibilities, for Hoggart this is not what informs the everyday condition of working class culture: 'they are substantially without a sense of the past'.⁹³ Here the academic's 'objective' and unexamined notion of space and time is problematised, appearing as something of a luxury in working-class life. Pleasures are grabbed when possible, lives dictated by the rhythms of factory buzzers and the wage packet; working people are not the heroes of their own inexorable narrative but 'cheerful existentialists'.⁹⁴

Hoggart clearly evinced the psychologism and lack of totalising vision that Perry Anderson found characteristic of the British intellectual tradition. To Anderson, his cultural analysis displayed the Leavisite lament for the decline in the quality of life, related to the rejection of the 'progressive' and inexorable thrust of Modernity, where 'ultimately ... the twentieth century itself becomes the impossible object. The era of revolution is, necessarily, unthinkable'.⁹⁵ Yet such ideas and the specific objections of those of the Left to The Uses of Literacy reveal a reliance upon an inescapably reductive and essentially idealistic epistemology. On this point it is salutary to note that the kind of doubts currently concerning radical politics and Marxist historiography were on the agenda from the moment in which the New Left was formed. American sociologist C. Wright Mills took those of the New Left to task for their reliance on what he termed the 'labor metaphysic', the faith in the revolutionary agency, if not *destiny* of the working class.⁹⁶ Anticipating Ernesto

⁹² Alan Swingewood, The Myth of Mass Culture, Macmillan, London and Basingstoke, 1977, p. 41.

⁹³ Hoggart, The Uses of Literacy, p. 190.

⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 133. On the relationship of time and poverty see David Vincent, Poor Citizens: The State and the Poor in Twentieth Century Britain, Longman, London, 1991, pp. 20-22.

⁹⁵ Perry Anderson, 'Components of the National Culture', p. 56.

⁹⁶ C. Wright Mills, 'The New Left' (1960), in Power, Politics and People: The Collected Essays of C. Wright Mills, Oxford University Press, New York, 1963, p. 256. Originally published as 'Letter to the

Laclau and Chantal Mouffe and their notion of the 'Jacobin imaginary', this concept could be described in (and describes) a belief in the empirical and theoretical *fact* of an autonomous and radical working class culture. It appears historically, present in the here and now *and will appear* in the achievement of the Socialist Millennium: it *is History*.

If Hoggart's moment, or the moment of Hoggart, had passed by the late 1960s the reasons for this lay in a paradigm shift wrought by an intensification of theoretical work and models deriving inspiration from the Continent. It is surprising then that it was there that he met with a new and receptive audience. Translated into French in 1970 as, La Culture du Pauvre, The Uses of Literacy was read in creative ways that appreciated its highly original insights.⁹⁷ Translator Jean-Claude Passeron introduced the book as a corrective to that very 'Theory' which avoided attending to the detail and lived reality of class. Over-intellectualising working-class life has involved an abstraction, serving 'to keep at bay a whole set of realities at once simple and scandalous - or worse than scandalous, vulgar'.⁹⁸ The scandal here of course was not sexual licentiousness, dirtiness or drunkenness, but any absence of political consciousness and indication of its likely development. The scandalised

New Left', New Left Review, No.5, September-October, 1960. Despite the occasional vagueness in his writing Williams was bold enough to admit to a belief in the historical destiny of the working class (see Raymond Williams. 'Priestly Against Topside' (Review Article), New Statesman, Vol LV11, No. 1452, 10 January 1959, pp. 47-48).

⁹⁷ Richard Hoggart, La Culture du Pauvre [Texte imprimé]: Étude Sur le Style de View des Classes Populaires en Angleterre, translated by Françoise and Jean-Claude Garcias and Jean-Claude Passeron, indexed and introduced by Passeron, Editions de Minuit, Paris, 1970. The translation into English of Passeron's introduction (cited hereafter) is by Richard Dyer in Working Papers in Cultural Studies, No.3, Spring 1971, pp. 120-31.

⁹⁸ Passeron, 'Introduction', p. 130

were those inflexible critics of the Left who Hoggart described elsewhere as being inhibited by an 'imaginative inadequacy' in their approach.⁹⁹

Somewhat effusive, Passeron's analysis is nonetheless a useful step towards an understanding of the logic of Hoggart's approach. It is argued that that The Uses of Literacy is a recognisable work of sociology, albeit one stripped of any familiar signs such as its terminology and method. It is an ethnographic work that has gone unrecognised as such for the simple fact that it does not present as its object the generic 'Other' - of Asia or Africa for instance - familiar in such work, determined as it is by an imperialistic gaze. It is a qualitative study of manners, a depiction of milieu 'not unlike the novelistic tradition', a connection indicating a highly complex and conscious intent.¹⁰⁰ Literary and 'objective' sociological representations of the working classes are revealed for their common mythical qualities. In the implicit exposé of 'sociology-fiction', and despite Hoggart's seeming antipathy to such organisation, Passeron finds strong theoretical foundations. It is 'a thoughtful contribution to the sociology of intellectuals'.¹⁰¹ It hints at 'the extent to which sociologists merely play among themselves when they play with an image of the working-class'.¹⁰² The intellectual has consistently assumed a privileged yet self-fulfilling role in discovering, interrogating and constructing this group as symbolic object. Thus, the book has the *makings* of a method that would enable an investigation of the ideological values present in descriptions of popular culture, attending to the position of the theorist in relation to his object of study.

⁹⁹ Hoggart, 'Speaking to Each Other', p. 136.

¹⁰⁰ Passeron, 'Introduction', p. 121.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 120

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 121.

This reading still affords Hoggart himself a level of authenticity and privilege based again upon his social credentials and the self-consciousness of his project. Indeed, it suggests that Hoggart does in fact provide us with an authentic rendering of his world for this very reason. This is achieved by virtue of the fact that the author is at the centre of the work, he becomes his own object. David Copperfield-like, his presence as a figure in the text (as the scholarship boy, perhaps) and as its organiser and interpreter highlights the way in which he imports his own prejudices and opinions, often at the expense of undermining his own strictures against romanticism, pity or condemnation.¹⁰³ The reader is invited through literary precedent (Passeron cites Marlow in Conrad's Heart of Darkness) to interrogate the worth of the work on the basis that: 'The reader sees what is intended to be said and also, from tone, from the unconscious emphases and the rest, he comes to know the man saying it'.¹⁰⁴

For Passeron there is also something quite writerly at work in Hoggart's 'semi-indirect style' (the expression of personal feelings and experience in the third person), and depiction of a milieu in which the narrator is a participating member. Essentially, he suggests that in its phraseology the book has designs of an objectivity that represents the working class perspective on the world: 'In other words, Richard Hoggart gives himself, by this implicit syntax, a means of introducing systematically characteristic schemes of popular thought in a descriptive discourse which can thus be organised continually according to the proper logic of the object described, even

¹⁰³ A celebrated feature of The Uses of Literacy, for many its key aspect, is the portrait of the scholarship boy. With personal resonance for Hoggart, one can think of this figure as somehow *orphaned* from the parent culture, a trait that affords him his privileges in this and other accounts. Appropriately enough, the American version of his autobiography is entitled A Measured Life: the

if it remains distinctly at the level of interpretation and exposition'.¹⁰⁵ In opposition to the ethnocentrism of the bourgeois intellectual, the book is organised along the principles of working-class consciousness and speech that it describes: form and content are reconciled. This is a highly suggestive idea, one that can be developed in fruitful ways. I would argue that in Passeron's sense, Hoggart has produced a work that one could describe as 'working-class', a characteristic that explains its focus and absences. Its validation of that life is guided by 'tolerance', the sense that 'Views never matter enough, but people do: you should not judge by rules but by facts, not by creed but by character'.¹⁰⁶ What one is presented with in the lack of theoretical abstraction, the insistence upon the personal and 'concrete' detail, is a fascination with people and relationships - the novelistic 'showing' that Hoggart suggests is the form preferred form by working-class readers.¹⁰⁷

Passeron values the work for the way in which it is inured from the temptation of asking of the group questions they would not ask themselves; those question put to them by intellectuals for *their* purposes and inspired by their epistemological framework. Hoggart has triumphed against the intellectual's defence mechanisms (in this case his own), which are likely to protect the self (himself) from the confrontation with such origins. In a Freudian sense he has effected 'the return of the unprivileged'.¹⁰⁸ It is worth noting that sociologist Pierre Bourdieu oversaw translation of the book into French.¹⁰⁹ In many respects it is echoed in his continuing

Times and Places of an Orphaned Intellectual (1994).

¹⁰⁴ Hoggart, The Uses of Literacy, p. 18.

¹⁰⁵ Passeron, 'Introduction', p. 124.

¹⁰⁶ Hoggart, The Uses of Literacy, p. 196.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

¹⁰⁸ Passeron, 'Introduction', p. 130.

¹⁰⁹ As mentioned by Derek Robbins, Bourdieu and Culture, Sage, London, 2000, p. xv.

project, especially a work like La Misère du Monde (1993).¹¹⁰ Here, Bourdieu has striven 'to create a form ... in which suffering (*suffrance*) might speak rather than be sociologically represented'.¹¹¹

Passeron's analysis is helpful and illuminating to any reading of The Uses of Literacy that is attentive to its more complex and conscious engagements. However, I suggest that he is mistaken (although not wrong *absolutely*) about its sociological rationale. More is revealed when one extends and understands the 'literary' assumptions - and assumptions about the nature of the 'literary' - that guide this work and its organisation.

Upon reading The Uses of Literacy, it is reported that F.R. Leavis said that while it had merit, the author would have done better to have written a novel.¹¹² Clearly, it is *not* a novel but seeks a similar effect throughout. As Hoggart maintains, 'It is some novels, after all, that may bring us really close to the quality of working-class life'.¹¹³ The aim is the evocation of 'the atmosphere, the quality, of their lives'.¹¹⁴ A real texture is achieved in the survey of the individuality and generality of 'those who live in the miles of smoking and huddled working-class houses in Leeds'.¹¹⁵ Ultimately, the invitation is to read the book with the same kind of sensibility one brings to the novel or any type of writing that is more than merely

¹¹⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, et al, La Misère du Monde, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1993. Translated as The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society, Polity, Oxford, 1999.

¹¹¹ Robbins, Bourdieu and Culture, p. 102.

¹¹² In one instance The Uses of Literacy was taken up primarily as a sublime piece of autobiographical writing. Amongst poems, stories and novel excerpts Hoggart took his place alongside Gorky, Nabokov, James Baldwin, Dylan Thomas, Borges and Joyce. See Maurianne Adams (ed.), Autobiography. The Bobbs-Merrill Series in Composition and Rhetoric, Bobbs-Merrill, Indianapolis, 1968.

¹¹³ Hoggart, The Uses of Literacy, p. 16.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, p. 18.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p. 19.

functional. The aim of Hoggart's investment in 'literariness' is a belief in its ability to achieve communication and empathy in the recognition between writer and reader.

The Uses of Literacy has been misunderstood by its more vituperative critics who have consistently failed to engage with its writerly terms, which are signalled in the very notification that it is 'based to a large extent on personal experience'.¹¹⁶ It *disclaims* the rigour of sociological surveys and is cautious about generalisation (although incautiously it does that exactly). Primary value lies in 'exploring experience, realizing experience through language'.¹¹⁷ Sex and violence novels, the address of modern magazines, populist writers in general - these fail to make demands on the reader, and of necessity 'cannot genuinely explore experience'.¹¹⁸ The flattening style of popular modern reading material means language avoids subtlety, qualification, texture and depth in the rendering of character, milieu and experience. It interpolates the reader as 'common man' in its appeal, a simplistic aggregate that has always formed the basis of injustice and prejudice rather than egalitarianism. By the same degree of course, it would be possible to argue that the totalising theory of the Left does something similar, eliding the unique qualities of individual experience in favour of the collective. Positive, challenging language and description is exactly that which The Uses of Literacy attempts to dress the working-classes and their culture in, conveying the very experience of working-classness, insisting that 'the "ordinary" is complex too; there are no simple people'.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Hoggart, The Uses of Literacy, p. 9.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 128.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 180-1.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 234.

If there is a distinction, The Uses of Literacy can be called a work of creative imagination rather than invention, conscious of how this is the quality of all good literary representation and insight. The contract with the reader implied in serious writing is that it connects if one attempts to connect with it, inviting activity rather than a passive consumption.¹²⁰ In the act of writing and the ontology of a 'complex' text lies as perceptive a truth as in any other discipline and its attendant mode of writing. In fact this issue, the limitations and meeting points of disciplinary labels, was the subject of a talk that Hoggart later delivered to sociologists of the British Association. Here, he announced that he and they shared common methods and goals. The organisation of observation, of types of data, the creativity and consciousness of the writer - these were factors that dissolved the boundaries of differing types of intellectual work: 'Literary artists are not objective, admitted; social scientists can only be "objective" within inverted commas ... So I do not see that a creative writer is inherently more likely to lead us astray in our understanding of society than a social scientist'.¹²¹

There is no absolute reason to consider this project to be any less convincing than that of the political scientist or sociologist. The kind of work Hoggart values has currency because of its considered insight and complex attainment of truth - by a writer open before 'experience', and reader who seeks to engage at more than a superficial level. Experience is his self-evident foundational concept, undefined, vague and subjectively recognised, although no more so than when employed by a

¹²⁰ In his autobiography Hoggart recalls a piece of Shavian advice that was his guide to tutoring, that 'you must understand a printed page as you understand people talking to you. That is a stupendous feat of sheer learning, much the most difficult I have ever achieved'. A Sort of Clowning, p. 130.

¹²¹ Richard Hoggart, 'The Literary Imagination and the Sociological Imagination', (1967), reprinted in

theoretically 'rigorous' historian. Yet it is his creative approach which indicates Hoggart's limitations too (and there are many!). One pointed evaluation in Universities and Left Review accepted that his thesis was 'rich and disturbing' yet asked 'are his conclusions true only for a particular regional stereotype? Would a direct account in terms of readership reaction differ from Hoggart's content-analysis of the publications themselves?'¹²² In conveying his own experience, his wider observations and considered insights into the lives and consciousness of others, Hoggart does indeed fail to *ask* anyone else about how and upon what terms *they* experience life and the threatening culture he felt authorised to warn against.

Stefan Collini has offered an explanation for the peripheral place of Hoggart in the memory of the Left which lies in the identification of him as mere *writer* whereas Williams was understood to be a *theorist*. The work of the writer, while admired and enjoyed, is not susceptible to 'application', it does not appear to present a set of tools or a prescription for further work.¹²³ I suppose that one of Williams' attractions for political radicals was his initial ambivalence about Marxism and his apparently more engaged position, the basis of which was a description of working-class culture in relation to a political history – trade unionism, collectivism and the spirit of solidarity. Thompson's irritable complaint about the uses of literacy and history was directed at a new social 'type', those for whom 'culture' was more important than politics. Such individuals coalesced about Universities and Left

Speaking to Each Other, Volume Two: About Literature, Pelican, London, 1973, pp. 256-7.

¹²² Introduction to discussion of The Uses of Literacy, Universities and Left Review, No.2, Summer 1957, p. 29.

¹²³ Collini, English Pasts, p. 213. In a standard collection of readings on cultural studies Hoggart (and Thompson for that matter) is excluded due to 'the stronger claims ... of more immediately *usable* material for understanding contemporary cultural practices'. See, Ann Gray and Jim McGuigan, Studying Culture: An Introductory Reader, Edward Arnold, London, 1993. p. viii. My emphasis.

Review, passionately committed to the arts while evading commitment on *central* (if 'impolite') issues of political allegiance, power and class struggle.¹²⁴ Such people displayed a recognisable sophistry that characterised them as 'anti-working class', tending to view working people as the passive *subjects* of history rather than its agents. Nonetheless, Hoggart's work did have positive applications as a pre-eminent work in facilitating the nation's ability to 'speak to itself'.

In his review Kingsley Amis suggested that 'Any social worker, children's officer, clinic assistant and so on who reads Mr Hoggart's book (I hope they all will) will find grounds for exercising the utmost kindness and patience in their dealings'.¹²⁵ From the late 1940s the progressive educational journal Use of English had been alerting teachers to the fact that there was a considerable distance between their assumptions and those of the majority in their charge. Several chapters of Hoggart's book were previewed in its pages whereupon it was understood as a kind of anthropological Baedeker's guide.¹²⁶ A decade after publication it was still proving its worth as 'a useful book for the teacher in training, giving the background from which many of the pupils of the Secondary modern schools are drawn'.¹²⁷ The original reviewer in Use of English was surprised and invigorated by the suggestion that the inauthentic and shoddy quality of mass communications could not be conflated directly with working-class experience and its *genuine* values.¹²⁸

¹²⁴ Thompson, 'Commitment in Politics', p. 54.

¹²⁵ Kingsley Amis, 'From Aspidistra to Juke-Box', Spectator, No.6714, 1 March 1957, p. 285.

¹²⁶ Richard Hoggart, 'Towards a Candyfloss World: 1. Changes in Popular Reading', Use of English, Vol.8, No.2, Winter 1956, pp. 111-117; 'Towards a Candyfloss World: 2. Changes in Popular Reading', Use of English, Vol.8, No.3, Spring 1957, pp. 159-64.

¹²⁷ Anne Taylor, 'English for Physical Education Students', Use of English, Vol.XVII, No.4, Summer 1966, p. 317.

¹²⁸ Frances Stevens, 'The Uses of Literacy and the Use of English', Use of English, Vol.IX, No.4, Summer 1958, p. 232.

Progressive English teachers drilled in Leavisite philosophy and techniques recognised the author's preoccupation with 'life' and 'experience', their presentation and evaluation in writing and reading. As an example of autobiographical writing it had conjured something fine out of what had hitherto been considered to be worthless material. As such it was a key prompt for those engaged in cultivating the same concerns and discriminating taste in their pupils through creative writing exercises.

The book was offered as a useful statement about the differing needs, abilities and potential of working-class children. In its unwillingness to consign the academically less able to their lot in the face of 'the candy-floss world', the realisation that people might become 'wise in their own way' it was a useful adjunct to other pedagogical debates. Questions were being raised about the nature of the curriculum, whether it was 'relevant', 'alive' and 'real' when speaking to the experience of the majority.¹²⁹ Like other 'working-class' texts, and as I detail in Chapter Six, extracts were collected in textbooks that sought to expand the type of material available to children.

In institutes of higher education too it quickly appeared on more 'progressive' syllabuses, notably those of the new universities of the 1960s.¹³⁰ The interdisciplinary character of the work meant it could be readily explored, if not always appreciated, in the fields of history, literature, geography and (increasingly) sociology. Similarly, its value would have been recognised by hundreds of WEA

¹²⁹ Grasby, 'Can an Industrial Society be Civilized?', p. 42.

¹³⁰ See for instance, P.W. Musgrove, 'Society in the Training of Teachers', Aspects of Education: the Professional Education of Teachers (Journal of the Institute of Education, The University of Hull), No.3, December 1965, pp. 41-54.

tutors already familiar with the general terms of Hoggart's arguments if not necessarily adopting the same democratic conclusions about 'culture' and its understanding.¹³¹ Thinking of how the book was formulated in this milieu and despite its apparent shortcomings, there is certainly a case to be made for the contribution that The Uses of Literacy offered to the widening project of labour and social history. It predated the establishment of the Society for the Study of Labour History, which held its inaugural conference in May 1960. In his opening address Asa Briggs drew attention to 'other questions of Labour history', those unaddressed gaps in the understanding of the working class 'situation'.¹³² He suggested that in its fullest sense social history should attend to more than an economic realm to give a sense of the *human* dimensions of historical *experience*.

It is also important here to consider Hoggart's profile as commentator and advisor in the formulation of cultural policy. His symbolic centrality in the infamous Lady Chatterley trial (1960), and as contributor to the Pilkington Committee (1962), are well known.¹³³ Less well-known is his earlier work on the Albermarle Report on the youth service. The post-war consolidation of the youth service can be seen as part of the progressive thrust of the era, an impulse to accentuate the general quality of life for all. However, initial enthusiasm and successes gave way to a torpor and lack of direction by the late 1950s, and its activities held little appeal for many

¹³¹ See for instance, Luke Spencer, 'From Appreciation to Engagement: Fifty Years of Literature Teaching', in Richard Taylor (ed.), Beyond the Walls: 50 Years of Adult and Continuing Education at the University of Leeds 1946-1996, The University of Leeds, Leeds, 1996, pp. 214-8.

¹³² Proceedings of the Inaugural Conference of the Society for the Study of Labour History, 6 May 1960, pp. 2-3.

¹³³ Subsequent to the trial, Hoggart provided an introduction to the book's second Penguin edition, D.H. Lawrence, Lady Chatterley's Lover. With an introduction by Richard Hoggart, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1961 (Second edition). On Pilkington and Hoggart's identification with its patronising tone see Roy Shaw, 'The Pilkington Puzzle', New Left Review, No. 16, July-August,

young people increasingly attracted by the gewgaws of prosperity. Here, Hoggart met with others who had produced less well-publicised work that recognised that 'normal, healthy adjustments of the working class to the tensions in a middle class world are too frequently ... patronized and belittled, often in a superior and amused way, by those responsible for writing and talking about our culture and leisure interests'.¹³⁴

Outside of easy criticisms of the consequences of affluence, Albermarle ascribed the faltering lure of the youth service to other factors such as a paternalism that spoke to children in terms of 'service' and 'responsibility' and 'leadership'. Valuable as these might be to members of the Committee, they concluded that 'we are sure that these particular words now connect little with the realities of life as most young people see them; they do not seem to "speak to their condition". They recall the hierarchies, the less interesting moments of school speech-days and other occasions of moral exhortation'.¹³⁵

Beyond its prescribed status, The Uses of Literacy did have an enormous appeal to that generation that came of age in Welfare-State Britain and contributed to its cultural identity. It had a ready constituency among intellectuals in and around the Labour Party and those who, despite the Education Act of 1944, could still be

1962, p.4.

¹³⁴ E.A. Peel, (Review Article) 'Delinquency and the Education of Society', British Journal of Educational Studies, Vol.VI, No.1, November 1957, pp. 776-80. See also Pearl Jephcott (compiler), King George's Jubilee Trust, Some Young People, George Allen Unwin, London, 1954.

¹³⁵ Ministry of Education ('The Albermarle Report'), The Youth Service in England and Wales. Report of the Committee Appointed by the Minister of Education in November 1958: Cmnd.929, HMSO, 1960, para. 145, pp. 39-40. See also Derek Hawes, Young People Today: An Account of Young People in Voluntary Youth Organisations, The Standing Conference of National Voluntary Youth Organisations and the National Council of Social Service, London, 1966.

labeled 'scholarship boys'.¹³⁶ Offered significant opportunities and advantages to a degree previously unavailable, this was a sizeable group following in the footsteps of individuals like Hoggart yet made their own meanings and voiced new demands of society. In this sense it is salutary to recall that the world of pre-war Oxbridge for instance was the domain of the 'bright young things', of peacock waistcoats and champagne lunches: a world of untroubled privilege. By the 1950s this environment had seceded to one characterised, if not dominated, by students provided for by state grants. Earnest and hard working, this was an *arriviste* group that W. Somerset Maugham was quick to label 'scum'.¹³⁷ For them, The Uses of Literacy offered a point of identification and communal validation, when Richard Hoggart's name became 'something of an incantation' in left-wing groups of undergraduates.¹³⁸ Self-consciously *serious* about their 'uprooted and anxious' condition, this group was characterised by feelings of being located in the borders of mutually uncomprehending worlds yet nonetheless - like Hoggart - aimed 'to link the two environments'.¹³⁹

For anyone moving in circles outside those one was born to, disguising one's origins was no longer an automatic reaction. Lower-class identity, if never really an absolute asset, achieved a regrettably fashionable, thus transitory, social status. Novelist Margaret Forster has said of her time at Oxford in particular that, 'Being working class at the end of the Fifties ... was *the* thing ... instead of being

¹³⁶ Chas Critcher, 'Sociology, Cultural Studies and the Post-War Working Class' in Clarke, Critcher and Johnson (eds), Working Class Culture, p. 17 and Hoggart, A Sort of Clowning, p. 140. See also, Carolyn Steedman, 'Writing the Self: the End of the Scholarship Girl', in Jim McGuigan (ed.), Cultural Methodologies, Sage Publications, London et al, 1997, pp. 106-125.

¹³⁷ W. Somerset Maugham in 'Books of the Year-1', The Sunday Times, 25 December 1955, p. 4.

¹³⁸ Dennis Potter, The Glittering Coffin, Victor Gollancz, London, 1960, p. 100. The book owed an enormous debt to Williams but Hoggart especially.

embarrassed by our class, or concealing it, we flaunted it, to great effect, realizing how special it made us'.¹⁴⁰ For Jeremy Seabrook at Cambridge, working-class roots were valuable, they represented 'a kind of accomplishment'.¹⁴¹ Fresh from a Forest of Dean mining family, the undergraduate Dennis Potter commented that: 'when faced with the choice, despite my frustrations with some of the norms of working-class life, I could but choose that world in preference to any other'.¹⁴²

Potter's path collided with Hoggart's on Jack Ashley's notorious BBC documentary series 'Does Class Matter?' (edition tx 25 August 1958). An accomplished imitator of Hoggart, his own documentary for the BBC 'Between Two Rivers' (tx 3 June 1960) took him back to the Forest of Dean to contemplate the way in which the consumer society was changing local life.¹⁴³ More importantly, it is his outstanding creative work for television that indicates something of the diffuse influence of his spiritual mentor. Plays such as Stand Up Nigel Barton (1965), Pennies From Heaven (1978) or Blue Remembered Hills (1979) are imbued with the analyses, typology and narratives of The Uses of Literacy.¹⁴⁴ Furthermore, the originality and detail of its insights as well as its very 'literariness' can be traced in

¹³⁹ Hoggart, The Uses of Literacy, p. 296.

¹⁴⁰ Quoted in Humphrey Carpenter, Dennis Potter: The Authorized Biography, Faber and Faber, London, 1998, pp. 92-3. See also Carolyn Steedman, Landscape for a Good Woman, p. 15. Most famously Sixties icons John Lennon and Paul McCartney accentuated their proletarian roots and manner, key aspects of their popular appeal and 'authentic' identity.

¹⁴¹ Jeremy Seabrook, What Went Wrong? Gollancz, London, 1978, pp. 260-61. An instructive source that has not been afforded any attention here is Bernard Bergonzi, No Lewisham Concerto, A Memori: 1929-59, mss., University of Warwick Library, qtoPR 55.B37, especially pp. 199 ff.

¹⁴² Potter quoted in Carpenter, Dennis Potter: The Authorized Biography, p. 56.

¹⁴³ This was later translated into his second book, The Changing Forest: Life in the Forest of Dean Today, first published in 1962.

¹⁴⁴ See also Peter Stead, Dennis Potter, Seren Books, Bridgend, Mid-Glamorgan, 1993, p. 19.

the contemporary flowering of writing that anticipated Hoggart's own hopes for 'the working class novel we may hope to have one day'.¹⁴⁵

Beginning in the 1950s a variety of creative writers were beginning to expand the vocabulary of cultural work and its 'emotional scale and expressiveness'.¹⁴⁶ They explored a milieu that as Hoggart lamented, 'one rarely finds accurately reflected in, for example, the English novel during the last half-century'.¹⁴⁷ Thus, The Uses of Literacy has been identified by Bernard Bergonzi as having a lot to do with establishing a sympathetic (rather than patronising) audience for this work. He heard its echoes in the voices of a predominately male roster of artists: Arnold Wesker, David Mercer, David Storey and John Arden.¹⁴⁸ Other names that might be added to this list include Barry Hines, Alan Sillitoe, Keith Waterhouse, Shelagh Delaney, Alun Owen, John Braine, Stan Barstow, Trevor Griffiths, a new generation of poets including Adrian Henri, Roger McGough, Adrian Mitchell and latterly Tony Harrison. One can even detect Hoggart's influence in the work of various pop groups.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵ Richard Hoggart, 'Working-Class World' (Review of Walter Allen's All in a Lifetime), New Statesman, Vol.LVII, No.1465, 11 April 1959, p. 519.

¹⁴⁶ Richard Hoggart, 'The Unsuspecting Audience', New Statesman Vol. LVI, No.1434, 6 September 1958, p. 310.

¹⁴⁷ Hoggart, 'Speaking to Each Other', p. 132.

¹⁴⁸ Bernard Bergonzi, Wartime and Aftermath: English Literature and its Background 1939-1960, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 1993, p. 8. See also Nigel Gray, The Silent Majority: A Study of the Working Class in Post-War British Fiction, Vision, London, 1973, p. 216.

¹⁴⁹ See for instance Mike Poole and John Wyver, Powerplays: Trevor Griffiths in Television, BFI, London, 1984, pp. 10-17. Mitchell famously wrote that '*Most people ignore most poetry/because/most poetry ignores most people*' (Adrian Mitchell, Poems, Jonathan Cape, London, 1964, p. 8). Harrison (b. 1937), poet and dramatist is himself a native of Leeds and his work constitutes an ongoing attempt to reconcile his classical training and reading with explorations of his roots. His poem 'Them and [uz]' is 'for Professors Richard Hoggart and Leon Cortez': '*I ... used my NAME and own voice*' (Tony Harrison, 'Them and [uz]' in Selected Poems, Penguin, London, 1987, p. 123. Originally in The School of Eloquence (1978), itself a title derived from a discussion in Thompson's The Making of the English Working Class. For a discussion of Hoggart's grateful appreciation of Harrison's dedication and the meeting of the two, see: Luke Spence, The Poetry of Tony Harrison, Harvester Wheatsheaf, New York, et al, 1994. Pop culture may have been

Developed in theatre and novel, the 'Kitchen-Sink' drama, so-called, was associated with many of those names listed above, although it made its greatest popular impact in the cinema. Many of the artists involved in the cinematic adaptations of working-class writing had already engaged with and even pre-empted Hoggart's thesis in the work of the Free Cinema grouping. Their films include: Momma Don't Allow (Karel Reisz and Tony Richardson, 1955), O Dreamland (Lindsay Anderson, 1953) and Nice Time (Claude Goretta and Alain Tanner, 1957) et al. In total they presented documentary versions of the 'candyfloss world' contrasted with a more authentic, communal vision, as in the portrait of Covent Garden in Every Day Except Christmas (Lindsay Anderson, narrated by Alun Owen, 1957).¹⁵⁰ Free Cinema also had similar democratic aims to Hoggart, 'to make people - ordinary people ... feel their dignity and their importance'.¹⁵¹ To an extent the same directors extended their ideas in their work in the commercial cinema, forming a corpus that resonates with the descriptions and types conjured up by The Uses of Literacy.¹⁵² Likewise, its echoes were also felt in the Granada Television series

characterised by an obsession for all things American but men much younger than Hoggart evinced an affection for music hall, folk music and the popular music of their parents generation. As Ray Davies of The Kinks sang: '*We are the Village Green Preservation Society ... preserving the old ways from being abused, protecting the new ways for me and for you*'. Ian MacDonald has suggested that The Beatles' 'Penny Lane' (1967) fathered 'a rather smug English pop vogue for brass bands and gruff northern imagery' (Revolution in the Head: The Beatles Records and the Sixties, Pimlico, London, 1992, p. 179).

¹⁵⁰ The comparison with Hoggart is made by Paul Cornelius as discussed in Erik Hedling, Lindsay Anderson: Maverick Film-Maker, Cassell, London and Washington, 1998.

¹⁵¹ Lindsay Anderson, 'Free Cinema', Universities and Left Review, No.1, Spring 1957, p. 52. After the demise of Picture Post in 1957 there was also a new strand of photo-journalism that sought to explore the world of the ordinary, directed largely by an emergent lower-class group of reporters. See Martin Harrison, Young Meteors: British Photojournalism: 1957-1965, Jonathan Cape, London, 1998.

¹⁵² See for instance the opening sequence of Saturday Night and Sunday Morning (Karel Reisz, 1960). The young sit in one room entertained by a drinking contest and a band singing Adam Faith's 'What do you want if you don't want money?' while the old crowd around a piano in another room singing along to 'Lily of Laguna'. See also, John Hill, Sex, Class and Realism: British Cinema 1956-1963, BFI, London, 1986; Terry Lovell, 'Landscapes and Stories in 1960s British Realism' in Andrew

Coronation Street, created by Tony Warren. Although Warren's own inflection on working-class life drew no inspiration from Hoggart it is hard not to understand it as formed within its orbit.¹⁵³ This connection was apparent at an early date in one comment complaining of the programme 'exaggerating and sentimentalising ... the warmth and neighbourliness of Northern working folk'.¹⁵⁴ An immediate and abiding success, it began its indefatigable run on 9 December 1960 and for several nights a week, for over forty years, the metonymic image of 'Weatherfield' and its ancient houses, already an anachronism half-a-century ago, have reached millions.

This connection seems to me to be of vital importance in the continued dissemination of ideas and representations of working-class life. Coronation Street's roster of over one hundred writers has included many names who have developed its themes and ideas, their work worthy of inclusion in any expanding working-class canon.¹⁵⁵ However this is not the object and one should be cautious of over-extending any listing of texts where features recognisably Hoggartian can be ticked off. The point is that those features *are* recognisable, in part having built upon tropes inherited by him and constructed from 'without' as much as by him and from within his class. Accented by others working in contemporary media and academic disciplines, they contributed to particular ways of representing and understanding the experience of 'working-classness' that persevere and have proven to be both empowering and inhibiting. As we have seen, the images of working class life in

Higson (ed.), Dissolving Views: Key Writing on British Cinema, Cassell, London, 1996, pp. 157-177

¹⁵³ Personal communication with the author, 3 March 2000. On the connections see Richard Dyer, 'Introduction' in Richard Dyer (ed.), Coronation Street, BFI, London, 1981.

¹⁵⁴ Bergonzi, 'The Pundits', p. 622.

¹⁵⁵ These have included: Jim Allen (The Wednesday Play; Play For Today; Days of Hope); John Finch (City '68, A Family At War, Sam); Jimmy McGovern (Brookside, et al); Allan Prior (Z-Cars);

The Uses of Literacy have been weighted with the 'burden of representation', subject to value judgements questioning their adequacy and authenticity based upon *a priori* (and indivisible) aesthetic and political criteria. And yet, at base, and at work on a larger scale, in this kind of project, is the assertion of a democratic entitlement *in* the enunciation of working-class life, that its experience and culture is worthwhile, has integrity and a rationale.

Jack Rosenthal (Pardon The Expression (Street spin-off), The Villains, Mrs Thursday, The Dustbinmen plus his innumerable plays) and course Tony Warren (chief writer from 1960-1976).

Chapter Four.

Charles Parker and The Everyday As Art, or, The Poetics of 'Life'.

'And the individual, powerless, has to exert the

Powers of will and choice

And choose between enormous evils, either

Of which depends on somebody else's voice'.¹

In a recent meditation on the autobiographical impulse novelist Martin Amis comments that 'We live in the age of mass loquacity. We are all writing it or at any rate talking it: the memoir, the apologia, the cv, the *cri de coeur*. Nothing, for now, can compete with experience - so unanswerably authentic, and so liberally and democratically dispensed. Experience is the only thing we share equally, and everyone senses this'.² This is a useful observation about the contemporary endpoint of the milieu and projects discussed in this thesis. The point is that this 'loquacity' has a history. Indeed, if one listens for how particular perspectives have been lent authenticity and authority over others -in the past *and* present - it is evident that what 'experience' is has not *always* been assumed to be either self-evident or so egalitarian. On the eve of the 1960s for instance, Dennis Potter suggested that the majority of working-class people and *their* values and perceptions were still excluded from any place in the nation's cultural life. Considering the obvious benefits of post-war affluence, he wrote that 'it has become ... hard to comprehend

¹ Louis MacNeice, *Autumn Journal*, Faber and Faber, London, 1996 (first published 1939), p. 15.

² Martin Amis, 'I've been name dropping, in a way, ever since I first said: "Dad"', *Guardian* (G2), 9

any method by which a more satisfactory common culture can be realized. How are people to begin seeing themselves *as people*, and not digits in the huge machines of the admass soporifics?³

As seen in the previous chapter, Potter was a characteristic New Left *man of working-class* origin. Like Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams, he felt the disparity of his own background and that privileged one that he was allowed to enter at Oxford University. But he was *not* concerned merely with extending this experience and its attendant culture *downward* to all. Like his intellectual mentors he sought to effect a rapprochement between the prescribed values of high culture and those of the everyday, the 'ordinary'. Potter was a good example of the new social type worrying E.P. Thompson in the pages of Universities and Left Review, with their preoccupation with culture to the neglect of 'politics'.⁴ Potter argued that in view of the proliferation of mass communications, the economic focus of Socialism now seemed outmoded, on the verge of ideological defeat. For him, it was in the cultural sphere however where there was cause for optimism and a possible 'revival on the Left' was signaled by a concatenation of events in this area. These included the staging of Look Back in Anger (1956), the publication of Declaration (1957), Universities and Left Review (1957) and The Uses of Literacy (1957). Also of note was the appearance of the term 'the Establishment' with its attendant arguments, and 'the renewed debate about 'involvement' and 'commitment' in the arts'.⁵ Work like

May 2000, p. 2. His autobiography is entitled Experience (2000).

³ Dennis Potter, The Glittering Coffin, Victor Gollancz, London, 1960, p. 121.

⁴ E.P. Thompson, 'Commitment in Politics' in Universities and Left Review, No.6, Spring 1959, p. 54.

⁵ Potter, The Glittering Coffin, p. 100. John Osbornes's play was first performed at the Royal Court Theatre on 8 May 1956, effectively launching the phenomenon of the 'Angry Young Man'. See also, Tom Maschler (ed.), Declaration, MacKibben and Kee, London, 1957; Hugh Thomas (ed.), The

this pinpointed a new 'oblique' approach to social problems, expressing 'attitudes which realize that the quality of our whole culture, particularly as expressed and exploited by the mass media, is a potent factor in creating that better and more noble society which is the one constant quality of the Socialist vision'.⁶

Aspects of this 'oblique' approach are revealed in the work and ideas of BBC Producer Charles Parker who, alongside Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger, created the seminal series known as the 'Radio Ballads'. Eight programmes appeared over a period from 1958-1963, beginning with The Ballad of John Axon and ending with The Travelling People. A minor controversy surrounded the series and its eventual cancellation by the BBC, ostensibly on economic grounds. Its creators insisted that this was a politically motivated move, a consequence of the radical nature and promise of a form which investigated aspects of ordinary life, utilising original, unscripted testimony ('actuality') melded to folk song commentary.

Scant enough in itself, any attention afforded the Radio Ballads themselves tends to pinpoint the contribution of Ewan MacColl and his creative lineage.⁷ This extends from 'Theatre Action' and his activities in the 'Popular Front' in the 1930s, to the post-war Folk Revival, in which the series fulfilled a vital role in extending and popularising its forms.⁸ While Derek Paget helpfully identifies the series as a significant event in the history of the documentary form, it is usually placed in

Establishment: A Symposium, Blond, London, 1959. All of these observations were developed later in more expansive yet vaguer manner by Raymond Williams in the third part of The Long Revolution (1961).

⁶ Potter, The Glittering Coffin, p. 101.

⁷ Not least of all his own, see Ewan MacColl, Journeyman: An Autobiography, Sidgwick and Jackson, London, 1990, pp. 311-336.

⁸ Georgina Boyes relegates it to a footnote in her history of folk. At the time, Francis Newton (i.e. Eric Hobsbawm) praised the ballads as one of the finest cultural contributions of the Revival. See, 'Two Cheers for Folk-Song', New Statesman, Vol. LXVI, No.1689, 26 July 1963, p. 119.

relation to that proliferation of texts concerned with working-class life that are touched upon in the last chapter.⁹ However, such descriptions tend to an uncritical acceptance of the producers' own claims about their achievements which concern the transparency of their representation of working-class life and the possibilities of an *authentic* popular culture. Gerald Porter, for instance, highlights how alliances were forged between trade unions, the CPGB and the creators. The fact that the National Union of Railwaymen helped the producers is fancifully enlisted to imply that they had some hand in the production of 'a significant new cultural genre that suggested how radio might become a medium that served progressive rather than Establishment interests'.¹⁰ Porter is right about the aim but offers no scrutiny of the terms underwriting it.

Stuart Laing describes the way in which most of the Ballads demonstrated the persistence of working-class culture by providing an 'emphasis on work as the primary determinant both of lifestyle and ways of seeing the world - a contradiction of the conventional wisdom concerning the changes wrought by affluence'.¹¹ This strikes me as a banal conclusion: an objective of the initial programmes was *exactly* to explore the culture of work, seeking to define 'authentic' working-class culture and re-present *as* a culture of labour. Thus, as my starting point in this chapter, I do not seek to evaluate the actual programmes themselves, but rather to investigate how

⁹ Derek Paget, True Stories: Documentary Drama on Radio, Screen and Stage, Manchester University Press, Manchester and New York, 1990, pp. 47 and 71. See also, John Caughie, Television Drama, Realism, Modernism, and British Culture, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000, p. 103.

¹⁰ Gerald Porter, 'The World's Ill-Divided': the Communist Party and Progressive Song' in Andy Croft (ed.), A Weapon in the Struggle: the Cultural History of the Communist Party in Britain, Pluto Press, London, 1998, pp. 184-5.

¹¹ Stuart Laing, Representations of Working-Class Life: 1957-1964, Macmillan, London, 1986, p. 163.

they were formulated, advertised and understood in a wider context.¹² As outlined in the preceding discussion of responses to The Uses of Literacy, eschewing or problematising the obviousness of the determining factor of 'working-class' life begins to illuminate a set of limited and limiting social, political and aesthetic *a priori* judgments about that life.

Friends, colleagues and supporters claim a place for Parker himself as 'one of the major pioneers in the now expanding field of Oral History'.¹³ They also suggest that his 'indefatigable energy and resource in the pursuit of difficult and unfamiliar ideas far outstripped the feeble state of media and cultural studies in his own time'. These are grandiose claims, implying that Parker is something of a forgotten yet important man, good reasons to explore and evaluate such a life.¹⁴ His personal development was certainly intriguing, described by himself as 'how a liberal bourgeois journalist became a socialist artist'.¹⁵ He was friend to many key figures of the period, working and corresponding with Richard Hoggart, Arnold Wesker, Stuart Hall, E.P. Thompson and the oral historian George Ewart Evans. His engagement with their projects situates his work within a wide variety of discourses. Focusing upon claims about the quality, meaning and uses of the English language

¹² The series is placed within its institutional context and examined in full from a different angle in J.A. Thomas, A History of the BBC Features Department, 1924-1964, DPhil, Oxford, 1993. Also of interest is Kate Whitehead, The Third Programme: A Literary History, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1989, pp. 123-5.

¹³ Richard Groves, Mary Baker and Phillip Donnellan, 'The Charles Parker Archive', History Workshop Journal, No.16, Autumn 1983, p. 148.

¹⁴ There is little recognition of his part in the historiography of oral history. Paul Thompson in his landmark work The Voice of the Past: Oral History, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1978, provides an exhaustive list of 'The Achievement of Oral History' (pp. 230-6), but finds no place for Parker. As far as I can tell, neither is there an acknowledgement in the allusively titled Living the Fishing, Paul Thompson with Tony Wailey and Trevor Lummis, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1983. See p. 200.

¹⁵ Charles Parker, 'The Dramatic Actuality of Working-Class Speech' in Wilfried van der Will (ed.), Workers and Writers (Proceedings of the Conference on Present-Day Working-Class Literature in

in relation to class, his ideas about culture questioned the circumscribed role of the BBC in British life, as well as guiding assumptions in the study of history, educational imperatives and practices. An aesthetics is particularly appropriate here for describing Parker's *ouvriérisme*. His theorisation of cultural forms and awe-ful appreciation of working-class life precipitated a utopian vision of 'the inevitable emergence of popular art of the most disturbing kind, a kind which asserts unequivocally the cultural superiority of the working class'. This vision was based upon his appreciation of the vernacular and 'the poetry and music which can come from such speech'.¹⁶

Hubert Charles Parker was born in 1919 to a middle-class Bournemouth family. Although it had fallen on hard times he attended the town's Grammar School and upon leaving took a job with the National Physical Laboratory where he trained as a metallurgist. A Royal Navy reservist, he was called-up when war was declared and for the duration of hostilities served as First Lieutenant on the submarine H.M.S. Sceptre, later commanding H.M.S. Umbra and winning a DSC in the process.¹⁷ While others reveled in the final victory and the democratic changes heralded by the 'People's War' he was devastated: 'he used to recall (ironically in his later years)

Britain and West Germany, held in Birmingham, October, 1975), p. 98.

¹⁶ City of Birmingham Central Library, Charles Parker Archive (Hereafter CPA) 1/6/8, 'Publications'. Charles Parker, 'Social Change in the 50s and 60s: "The Media and the Masses"', mss., 31 July 1974, p. 8. The main file is indicated by the first two numbers (e.g. 1/6). The main title of the file is given in each initial citation.

¹⁷ Sources: Paul Shilston, 'Charles Parker- Man With a Microphone', Queens' College Record, 1997, p. 18; Philip Donnellan, 'Tribute: Master of the Waves', Guardian, 11 December 1980, p. 11; Anon, 'Richard Groves - A Tribute', Charles Parker Archive Trust Annual Report November, 1988; Kenyon Calthrop and Graham Owens (eds), Teachers for Tomorrow: Diverse and Radical Views About Teacher Education, Heineman, London, 1971, p. 179.

how when Attlee's overwhelming election victory was announced he felt that all he had been fighting for was lost'.¹⁸

After demob, he pursued a degree in History at Queens College Cambridge, graduating in 1948.¹⁹ Subsequently, he decided to approach the BBC for a job: 'His entry ... was characteristic: he walked up to the reception desk, said, "I hear you're looking for bright young men," and - "...was in!"'²⁰ Initially, he worked for the North American Service of the Corporation, at home and in the USA itself. In 1953 he was appointed Senior Features Producer for BBC Radio in the Midlands Region, which took him to Birmingham.

Two significant events from this period informed Parker's personal outlook and approach to work, leading directly to the first actuality ballad of 1958. The first concerns technological innovation in the development of newer, smaller yet efficient means of tape-recording which entailed new practices and freedoms for programme makers. Of the encounter with the EMI portable tape-recorder, first produced in Britain in 1952, Parker's colleague and occasional collaborator Philip Donnellan has claimed that 'For many of us it was a radicalising experience, technically, politically and socially'.²¹ Hitherto, broadcasting producers and their creative teams had been bound to the studio or limited by the financial burden imposed by the vehicle and

¹⁸ 'A.B.B.', 'Obituary: Mr Charles Parker', *The Times*, 20 December 1980, p. 14.

¹⁹ He is registered under 'Historical Tripos Division (Dsc Parker, H.C. Queens' 1948)' in *The Cambridge University Calendar for the Year 1948-49*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1948, p. 246. This conflicts with the accounts of Philip Donnellan (unpublished biographical entry - draft- for *National Dictionary of Biography*, loaned by Mary Baker to the author) and Shilston, who suggest that Parker graduated in English Literature. Given that F.R. Leavis was at the height of his powers and influence at Downing College, and with people like Raymond Williams there at the same time, it would place Parker within a formidable intellectual milieu. Of course, despite the paper qualification there is nothing to suggest that Parker did not encounter Leavisite ideas or pursue an interest in the literary.

²⁰ 'A.B.B.', 'Obituary', p. 14.

²¹ Donnellan, 'Tribute: Master of the Waves', p. 11.

cumbersome equipment necessary for field trips or outside broadcasts. From now on the pursuit of material would not be subject to the formality and mystique of the studio and the scrutiny of professional technician and presenter. For Parker, it meant that 'you could go into "*life* "', and what was meant by 'life' is a key issue here.²²

A second galvanising event occurred in 1957 when Parker received a tape of an American Radio Broadcast of The Lonesome Train, a cantata written by Millard Lampell and Earl Robinson. This told the story of the transportation of Abraham Lincoln's body to its resting place through the use of song and the testimony of witnesses. Robinson (1910-1991) was a left-wing American composer (subject to House of Un-American Activities Committee blacklisting in 1952) who collaborated with Woodie Guthrie, Paul Robeson, Huddie 'Leadbelly' Ledbetter, Pete Seeger and Alan Lomax, for whom he had collected various folk and blues recordings. Writer of the seminal 'Joe Hill', he joined the Workers' Theater Project, conducted the American People's Chorus and took part in various American folk-music radio shows.²³

This was work that was well known in Britain amongst cultural progressives. Robinson's Ballad for Americans, written with Jack La Touche and starring Paul Robeson, drew universally enthusiastic notices when it was broadcast in December 1940 on the BBC Home Service. The Daily Worker praised it for its 'fresh, uncommercial spirit', sneering at the way in which it had been claimed by various commentators when it was clearly of and for 'the people'.²⁴ Such work was valuable

²² Parker, 'The Dramatic Actuality of Working-Class Speech' p. 98 (My emphasis).

²³ See: Phil Hardy and Dave Laing, The Faber Companion to 20th-Century Popular Music, Faber, London, 1990, p. 676.

²⁴ Anonymous, 'They All Claim Ballad For Americans', Daily Worker, 6 January 1941, p. 5.

because it offered a template for a democratic culture, and as one correspondent to the BBC commented, 'A similar piece of work would find a place in this country, since it expresses the desire of the common people to make the country their own'.²⁵

The Lonesome Train itself was the fruit of song collecting, oral history and the creative interpretation of such material. Its creators were described as having:

wandered over the country, listened to the people sing, watched them dance; they steeped themselves in the rhythms of the American people, on the field, in the factories, in the mines and in the tall cities. They live and understand this music of ours, and it was many years ago that Earl Robinson first began to experiment with the shaping from it of a new art form ... No art form can reach its fullest maturity until it understands the people and identifies itself with them; art cannot borrow, it must build, and thereby The Lonesome Train becomes a solid block in the making of our musical tradition.²⁶

The philosophy and practice of such work and the progressive, welfare culture of the New Deal which endorsed it, were acknowledged inspirations for the Radio Ballads, the folk movement and oral history.²⁷

²⁵ Quoted in Anon, 'Radio', Daily Worker, 1 January 1941, p. 3. It was made available to post-war audiences through the Topic Label. In 1952 the label released a version of 'Joe Hill' sung by Paul Robeson (TRC 60: 'The Chinese Soldiers' Song' (Modern words to an old tune); 'Riding the Dragon' (old children's song of China) and 'Joe Hill') and 'Ballad for Americans Parts one and two' (TRC 61: Text by John Latouche, music by Earl Robinson. Sung by the London Youth Choir with Martin Lawrence (bass). Conducted by John Hasted; arr. Arnold Clayton).

²⁶ Howard Fast, 'Forward' to Millard Lampell (text) and Earl Robinson (music), A Cantata: The Lonesome Train (A Musical Legend), Sun Music, New York, 1945 (no page).

²⁷ CPA 1/3/1/16, 'Lectures Given by Charles Parker'. 'The Missing Link: John B. Sheldon Annual Memorial Lecture, 30 September 1966', mss., p. 3. Peggy Seeger's under-acknowledged involvement with the Ballads indicates a set of suggestive associations with such projects via her family's work in the United States on working-class culture, folk music and within the Federal Theatre Project etc. Peggy and brothers Pete and Mike were all musicians inspired by father Charles Seeger, a Harvard musicologist. Pete Seeger, highly influential on the American folk and folk-life scene (and later by import to the British scene) left Harvard in 1938 assisting collector Alan Lomax on a series of song-collecting trips in the American South. He later formed the Almanac Singers with Lee Hays, Millard

Broadcast before Today in Parliament, The Ballad of John Axon originally appeared at ten o'clock on the night of Wednesday 2 July 1958. It told the story of the eponymous Railwayman who had died trying to halt a runaway train in the previous year and had been awarded a posthumous George Cross. There was something quite unusual about such a commission which was begun in autumn 1957, barely months after the driver's death: 'it was still early days for a programme which could be placed in the "obituaries for distinguished personages" category'.²⁸ Despite his heroic sacrifice Axon was after all just an 'ordinary' working man.

The story had obvious appeal for Parker's tastes with its similarities with American folksongs such as 'Casey Jones', which he enjoyed performing to delighted audiences at dinner parties.²⁹ The point of departure from traditional BBC practice occurred when he went on a research trip to Axon's hometown of Stockport, accompanied by MacColl and armed with his midget recorder, then still used mainly as a tool for radio journalism. The intention was to record conversations with locals in order to provide source material for the development of a script with occasional direct quotes, voiced by actors, that would also add 'local flavour'. However 'It soon became apparent ... that the material they were beginning to record merited much more than this'.³⁰ Several hours of interviews revealed the idiosyncratic speech of locals and railway workers in which Parker perceived a powerful veracity, a 'built-in oral charge' that 'held an authenticity of a quite

Lampell and Woody Guthrie. After war service, Pete Seeger was director of People's Songs and co-founder of folk-life/theoretical/aesthetic journals Sing Out! (1950) and Broadside (1961).

²⁸ Charles Parker, 'John Axon and the Radio Ballad' notes to Ewan MacColl and Charles Parker, The Ballad of John Axon, Argo Recording RG 474 (1965), (no page).

²⁹ As taught to him by American servicemen during the war. See CPA 1/6/1/1. Charles Parker, 'Article for Ballad and Blues Folk Music Yearbook', mss., 1960, no page.

³⁰ Parker, 'John Axon and the Radio Ballad'.

different order from that attainable in a studio'.³¹ MacColl recalled that something quite remarkable had been captured in this talk, a cultural picture, 'charged with the special kind of vitality and excitement which derives from involvement in a work-process'.³²

The resulting programme went beyond the heroic individual narrative to examine the reasons for John Axon's self-sacrifice, his fealty to the job and his colleagues. As Parker later put it in the argot of the period, it sought to portray the work of the railwayman as part of a 'whole way of life'.³³ Trailing the programme in an article for the Radio Times, he wrote of the deliberately eclectic nature of the music and form, warning that 'you will find that we take liberties with conventions you may cherish ... relying upon the real people ... to tell their story simply and directly'.³⁴ This liberty lay in the fact that it eschewed conventional narration by an authorial *Corporation* voice. Commentary and guidance was provided by original songs and music, the direction of which was guided by the words and voices of the participants themselves.

A BBC survey of listeners revealed plenty of criticism in response to such daring. Primarily, this centered upon the issue of dealing with the life of a man only recently killed, suggesting that the programme was in 'questionable taste'. Likewise, the use of jazz and calypso alongside folk tunes was deemed to be 'un-British'. Nonetheless, praise was of a high order too, recognising that here was 'a real break into a new art form', it was welcomed for being 'unconventional, untraditional, but

³¹ Parker, 'John Axon and the Radio Ballad'.

³² MacColl, Journeyman, p. 313.

³³ Charles Parker, 'The Arts in Society: The Radio Ballad', New Society, 14 November 1963, No. 59, p. 25.

all completely right'. One appraisal was phrased in familiar cultural rhetoric, commenting that 'it was refreshing to hear songs which have some relationship with everyday working-class existence, rather than the moon/june stories of tin-pan alley'.³⁵

Such positive responses echoed the enthusiasm and terms that characterised its evaluation by newspaper critics, amongst whom the programme received extensive coverage and universal praise as an artistic success and for its innovative approach. The Evening Sentinel, held to be the most important outlet for radio criticism, found the programme both gripping and humbling.³⁶ The Daily Mail afforded it a double page feature, concentrating on its 'ruthlessly realistic' tone, commenting that it was 'weird, shocking'. Interestingly, Paul Ferris of the Observer found the BBC tones of presenter John Snagge that bookended it to be an intrusion.³⁷ The Daily Worker found it one of the few things in that year's radio output to be worthy of celebration.³⁸ Tom Driberg of New Statesman noted the 'Gilpinesque colloquialism of the narrative' (i.e. the linking songs), generously commenting that: 'Fletcher's dream of being read by a poet living a thousand years hence is unlikely to be realised! But a generation from now - I would even say

³⁴ Charles Parker, 'The Ballad of John Axon', Radio Times, Vol.139, No.1807, 27 June 1958, p. 330.

³⁵ All quotations from CPA 2/64/2/1. 'Charles Parker: Programmes and Projects'. 'BBC Audience Research Department. LR/58/1051. Week 27. "The Ballad of John Axon" (Wed. 2 July 1958)', document dated 16 July 1958.

³⁶ Quoted in CPA 2/64/2/1. Memo, BBC Midland Region Publicity Department. 10 July 1958, Subject: News Summary, to: (various, including) Charles Parker.

³⁷ Quoted in CPA 2/64/2/1. Memo, BBC Midland Region Publicity Department. 3 July 1958, Subject: News Summary, to: (various including). Charles Parker.

³⁸ Quoted in CPA 2/64/2/1 BBC Midland Region Publicity Department. 10 July 1958.

centuries from now - listeners will surely still be moved by the recording of *The Ballad of John Axon*'.³⁹

It is uncertain whether it was an appreciation of the language of the working classes or a fetish for locomotive engines that stirred Philip Henderson in the Listener. For him there was a congruence of the tone of worker and work, the 'flat Lancashire accents went well with the clang and hiss of the engines themselves'.⁴⁰ William Webb of the Manchester Guardian opined that 'This really was some of the characteristic poetry of the idiom of the people'.⁴¹ Webb had his reservations however, and was initially confused by the form and the absence of a navigating authoritative voice. These fears were allayed and he celebrated the combination of jazz, folk and other material for its simplicity and the lack of self-conscious 'folksiness'. But most memorable and worthy or remark were the 'gentle reminiscing Northern voices' of the people themselves.

Mainly concerned with a public sphere framework and debates about the historical and modern limits of the media and its potential, much has been written about the place of the BBC in imagining British national life in the last eighty years.⁴² In Chapter One I identified the limits that the Corporation set in articulating a national *voice*, indicating how any discussion about the presence of 'working-

³⁹ Tom Driberg, 'Nightingales Awake', New Statesman, Vol LVI, No.1426, 12 July 1958, pp. 46-47.

⁴⁰ Philip Henderson, 'The Spoken Word: Black and White', Listener, Vol. LX, No.1528, 10 July 1958, p. 68.

⁴¹ 'W.L.W', 'Radio Notes: A Modern Ballad Opera and Folk Hero', Manchester Guardian, 3 July 1958, p. 3.

⁴² E.g., see Oliver Boyd-Barrett and Chris Newbold (eds), Approaches to Media: A Reader, Edward Arnold, London, 1995, especially Oliver Boyd-Barrett, 'Conceptualizing the "Public Sphere"'; Nicholas Garnham, 'The Media and the Public Sphere' and John B. Thompson, 'The Theory of the Public Sphere'. See also, James Curran and Michale Gurevitch (eds), Mass Media and Society, Edward Arnold, London, 1991 and Paddy Scannell, Philip Schlesinger and Colin Sparks (eds), Culture and Power: A Media, Culture and Society Reader, Sage Publications, London, 1994, especially Scannell's 'Public Service Broadcasting and Modern Public Life'.

class' experience in this sphere centered upon accent and dialect. Commentary on The Ballad of John Axon seems to affirm that despite some liberalisation during the war, the presence of working-class voices and experiences were still a rarity on British radio. When the BBC's charter came under review in 1949 it was an issue barely acknowledged by the Broadcasting Committee, chaired by the architect of post-war reform, Lord Beveridge. However, one of the Committee's members, A.L. Binns, Director of Education for Lancashire, bemoaned the fact that British broadcasting was too 'highbrow'. As Asa Briggs reports, he sought to communicate the views of ordinary people of the north to the southerners of the Committee, explaining 'that somebody had told him in a Yorkshire pub that broadcasting consisted of "posh voices talking down to us"'.⁴³

With the advent of commercial television Richard Hoggart offered a similar observation by way of explanation for the significant losses in audience figures experienced by the Corporation. Commenting on the its public image he enlisted a description from his The Uses of Literacy to suggest that 'Great numbers of people simply assume that the BBC is "Them"'.⁴⁴ Of course, it had high standards and produced remarkable programmes, yet this quality also pinpointed its enduring weakness 'that they do not have a sufficiently wide sense, or one sufficiently sensitive outside recognised intellectual or "cultured" areas, of the strengths of British life. One is repeatedly struck by their lack of closeness to the "thisness" of

⁴³ Asa Briggs, The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom. Vol.4: Sound and Vision, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1979, p. 301.

⁴⁴ Richard Hoggart, 'BBC and ITV after Three Years', Universities and Left Review, No.5, Autumn, 1958, p. 33.

people's lives, the communications missed through a narrowness of tone'.⁴⁵ The problem lay in the way that the Corporation spoke *at*, rather than *with* the majority. One remedy for this situation that had been offered by Binns was that 'more use should be made of the voices of intelligent working men speaking as "authorities in their own right"'.⁴⁶

Despite such critiques, and as I also suggest in Chapter One, the BBC was by no means homogenous in its 'Themness'. In fact, Parker came to see himself as the inheritor of a particularly innovative tradition, what he termed the 'liberal dispensation' exemplified by figures such as Olive Shapley, Archie Harding, Val Gielgud, Lawrence Gilliam, D.G. Bridson and especially Louis MacNeice.⁴⁷ Like many of them, Parker's work was a product of the regional structure of the Corporation that allowed a producer to 'plough his own furrow without reference to London'.⁴⁸ This lineage aside, claims for the significance and *originality* of the Radio Ballads as challenge to a narrow cultural purview ignore a number of things. Certainly a survey of radio programming of the period shows a smattering of talks *about* working-class life and concerns, revealingly 'often pitched at Third programme level'.⁴⁹ However, working-class *voices* were heard to a degree and in particular ways: 'Access to the air for "ordinary" people was generally more likely to be found in entertainment programmes such as *Have a Go*'.⁵⁰ This is an important observation, framing the prescriptive attitudes to what constituted 'proper' working-

⁴⁵ Hoggart, 'BBC and ITV after Three Years', p. 35.

⁴⁶ Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom*. Vol.4, p. 301.

⁴⁷ Charles Parker, 'Letter: Radio Ballads', *The Times*, 20 November 1972, p. 17.

⁴⁸ CPA 1/6/8. Parker, 'Social Change in the 50s and 60s', p. 10.

⁴⁹ Jeff Walden, Senior Document Assistant BBC Written Archives Centre, personal communication with the author, 18 November 1998.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

class expression and experience and its treatment by the media. There is also a question about the place of the series within what was increasingly a medium with a minority appeal, although Parker's champions have made overly enthusiastic statements such as radio 'still held a massive audience'.⁵¹ In terms of listeners in the Midlands Region alone a programme like The Ballad of John Axon could expect a bare 1% share of the broadcasting audience, and it was a cause for concern that having been trailed with considerable emphasis as an 'event' its performance was only average.⁵² David Gretton, Assistant Head of Regional Programming, complained to Parker about the disappointing listening figures, suggesting that it was ultimately 'a connoisseurs piece'.⁵³ Such information invites one to consider the more fascinating terms on which the programme was advertised by Parker and received by its audience. Indeed, a crucial question is who were these 'connoisseurs' for whom these representations of working-class life were so valuable?

Parker himself described the response to The Ballad of John Axon as 'staggering', although it was its status as a critical hit and its perception as a cultural milestone that alleviated doubt and criticism within the Corporation.⁵⁴ In fact, The Ballad of John Axon was submitted as the BBC entry to the prestigious *Prix D'Italia* competition of 1958 and over the next few years Parker managed to produce several more programmes with fluctuating artistic and critical success. Song of the Road (tx

⁵¹ Trevor Fisher, Charles Parker: Aspects of a Pioneer: A Personal View, The Charles Parker Archive, Birmingham, 1986, p. 2. Excluding children, total listening figures in 1958 were down from 17,100,000 to 14,000,000 (As reported by Tom Driberg, 'They Who Must Decrease', New Statesman, Vol. LVI, No. 1429, 2 August 1958, pp. 142-3).

⁵² BBC audience research methods had settled upon a figure of '66' as an index of 'approval' and The Ballad of John Axon garnered '61'.

⁵³ CPA 2/64/2/1. Memo, 14 July 1958, AHRP (David Gretton) to Charles Parker.

⁵⁴ Charles Parker, 'The Arts in Society: The Radio Ballad', p. 25.

5 November 1959), for instance, dealt with the building of the M1 motorway and the men who made it:

We built the canals, we laid the tracks

Of railways here to hell and back,

And now we're going to have a crack

At the London-Yorkshire Highway.

This was followed by Singing the Fishing (tx 16 August 1960), about the fishing industry, gaining success as winner of the *Italia* prize. Thereafter came: The Big Hewer about mining (tx: 18 August 1961); The Body Blow about polio and disability (tx: 27 march 1962); On the Edge about young people (tx: 13 February 1963); The Fight Game, about boxing (tx: 3 July 1963) and The Travelling People which concerned Gypsies (tx: 17 April 1964).

In his autobiography, MacColl suggests that his producer was at best somewhat naive about the import of the matters they were dealing with in the series. Evidence suggests that, on the contrary, Parker launched himself into the promotion and theorisation of the work in a manner indicating that he was highly conscious of its cultural implications. In his first Radio Times article, he indicated the issues that had been raised for him in this work. These concerned national identity, race, tradition and the atrophy of popular culture and the need for its reinvigoration. As the series developed he became increasingly committed to promoting it as a contribution to contemporary cultural debates. The impetus for his enthusiasm was a personal volte-face, after all this was a man who later confessed before one audience that 'I was brought up to believe that everywhere North of Winchester was an

industrial wilderness of wife-beaters and insanitary slums, and my formal education did little to disabuse me of such an attitude to the true quality of my countrymen'.⁵⁵ Like so many before him, he ventured into this wilderness and encountered a genuine humanity where he had thought there was none, reacting with humility and often guilt about his social prejudice and what he ultimately felt to his own middle-class inadequacies. Recalling his research amongst various mining communities for The Big Hewer, he wrote that

It was always with a sense of shock that, meeting with such men on the surface, fresh from the pithead baths, I found seemingly ordinary, quiet spoken people much like other men, until, that is, they began to talk about their work and their way of life. And then, in their words, they conjured up this strange superhuman quality, whether they spoke in the accent of Durham, or the Midlands, or South Wales.⁵⁶

In a variety of outlets he expended much effort elaborating on the series as a new cultural form 'derived from the sole use of documentary speech recordings, or "actuality", as a basic element in the work'.⁵⁷ Involving enormous amounts of fieldwork and the recording of 'conversations' (never 'interviews') the task was to overcome social prejudice, communicating a belief in the speech and experience of 'ordinary people' that was so often devalued or completely ignored. The imperative for the intellectual therefore, was to go back to the people, to sit humbly at the feet of fishermen, travellers and construction workers - to be educated in a new way, in

⁵⁵ CPA 1/3/1/16. Parker, 'The Missing Link', p. 2.

⁵⁶ Charles Parker, 'The Big Hewer', Radio Times, Vol.152, No.1970, 10 August 1961, p. 51. As an example of the relative place of such radio programming in the media sphere, this was broadcast on the Home Service from 8.30 to 9.30 - a Friday night - in competition with Russ Conway and Bob

front of language on the lips, in use. Parker's technique for eliciting articulate expression, for disarming the suspicions of his subjects was indeed to sit at their feet, literally.

In this encounter something new and extraordinary occurred, resultant of asking questions about particular experiences that had not been asked before. For Parker, speakers themselves experienced a kind of reverie when turning to contemplate anew the routine of their lives - a miner collecting his lamp and docket as he goes down the pit for instance. Thus, 'they take off into moments of extraordinary almost oral exaltation if you like, in which the language, really becomes incandescent, and you are sort of washed away'.⁵⁸ *Unexceptional* experience is conjured as something else when treated with the passionate speech of people newly aware of a power and poetry of their words. In this manner the 'ordinary' was afforded significance and as a result (in theory at least), 'ordinary' people assumed a position of authority over the narration of their own lives.

In one essay Parker reflected on the implications of this for BBC practice. An in-house document, 'Principles and Practice in Documentary Programmes', outlined the nature of authority as claimed for and constructed by the Corporation. It asserted that a speaker

must be someone whom the audience recognises as having the right to express a personal opinion, and whom they clearly understand as doing so as himself and not as the BBC ... an expert, a scientist or politician, or

Hope on the television!

⁵⁷ Parker, 'John Axon and the Radio Ballad'.

⁵⁸ Transcript: Charles Parker, *The Tape Recorder and the Oral Tradition*, (tx: 11 September 1971, Radio 3, Producer Michael Mason). Copy loaned to the author by Helen Lloyd, BBC Radio WM.

professional man ... Equally a journalist or broadcaster can rise (sic) to a stature in which he is expected to express judgment of his own ... like Malcolm Muggeridge.⁵⁹

Parker dismissed any claim to an overall, reassuring or commanding authority in his work: 'the only authority I expect the words or music in a programme to command is the authority of manifestly authentic utterance, which stands or falls as the audience accepts or rejects it in the light of their own experience'.⁶⁰

Such appraisals of the qualities of his subjects compares with the Leavisite thinking that underwrote Hoggart's faith in the 'literary'. For Parker, working-class language was valuable because it was something 'which came straight out of experience'.⁶¹ Furthermore, it was informal, unfettered, 'real' and organically connected to the individual. At the same time however, this was speech imbued with 'life'. This was something that for him was understood to be *outside* of a certain kind of educational process whose results were evinced by a stagnant elite, 'preoccupied with manners, with beauty, with aesthetics ... with polite usage, grace', qualities which 'turn on themselves and become sterile'. Middle-class talk was ultimately 'a barrier to hide behind, not ... a means of communication'. The vernacular was that 'which satisfied', it was 'rich ... accurate, economical'.⁶² At its most effective this could be found at the margins of the nation - amongst the speakers of Gaelic and Welsh, but also in the ways that they used English. It was particularly evident amongst groups such as the miners who spoke in a manner 'in

⁵⁹ Charles Parker, 'On What Authority?', New Statesman, 26 January 1973, Vol. 85, No. 2184, p. 134. The qualification is Parker's.

⁶⁰ Ibid. See also, Whitehead, The Third Programme, p. 125.

⁶¹ Parker, 'The Dramatic Actuality of Working-Class Speech', p. 99.

which every syllable, every vowel is, so to speak, caressed by the voice, and the concepts are felt with a passion'.⁶³ In turn, the incorporation of this kind of talk into the Radio Ballads lent the form the authority of authentic art:

By dispensing with conventional continuity devices of studio narrator, caption voice, dramatic vignette, and so on, the radio ballad makes something of the same imaginative demands upon its audience as does the traditional ballad (insistently drawing the listener to participate imaginatively in the action by having, himself, to work and fill in out the deliberately spare and open-ended form). While the radio form is much more complex, it retains that quality of authenticity, of concrete and direct utterance which the ballad proper shares with the best of documentary.⁶⁴

And the Radio Ballads were understood *as* serious art. In an article drawing attention to the decline in BBC *listeners* Tom Driberg placed The Ballad of John Axon alongside a production of Dylan Thomas' Under Milkwood as broadcasts of 'artistic importance' and in need of encouragement.⁶⁵ Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel later suggested that alongside The Goons the series represented 'the only truly imaginative attempt to use sound broadcasting creatively'.⁶⁶ When the Radio Ballads were issued on record by Argo - a subsidiary of the Decca label - they were sold alongside traditional folk records, recordings of railway noises, classical works, recitations of contemporary poetry and Shakespeare's plays.⁶⁷ They were also

⁶² Parker, The Tape Recorder and the Oral Tradition, pp. 1-2.

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 2.

⁶⁴ Charles Parker, 'John Axon and the Radio Ballad'.

⁶⁵ Tom Driberg, 'They Who Must Decrease', p. 142.

⁶⁶ Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel, The Popular Arts, Hutchinson Educational, London, 1964, p. 259.

⁶⁷ Laurence Aston, 'The Radio-Ballads: 1957-1964', 'Sleevenotes', The Ballad of John Axon, Topic Records, TSCD 801, 1999 (first Issued 1965), no page.

recognised as serious contributions to debates about the nature and possibility of a genuinely popular, authentic working-class culture.⁶⁸

Recognising the scarcity of serious and humane treatments of working class life in the media, on completion of The Ballad of John Axon Parker had transcripts of the extensive actuality forwarded to the obvious expert of the day - Richard Hoggart.⁶⁹ Similarly, he initiated a correspondence with archetypal 'Angry Young Man' and proletarian artist - Arnold Wesker.⁷⁰ The playwright was still flushed with the success of Chicken Soup With Barley (1958) which had broken new ground when it was premiered in the regions - at Coventry's Belgrade Theatre - before following Osborne's Look Back In Anger to the Royal Court in London. Its sequel, Roots (1959), dealt with some of the issues that Hoggart had raised in The Uses of Literacy. In the arguments of its protagonists it debated the nature of commercial culture, its denigrating effects and appeal to working-class people.⁷¹ By the time Roots appeared, Parker was confident enough of his own project and contribution to contemporary debates to criticise Wesker. He wrote that his portrayal of 'the graceless boorishness of the Norfolk Agricultural labourer' constituted a *betrayal*.

⁶⁸ Bill Holdsworth, 'Songs of the People', *New Left Review*, No.1, January - February 1960, p. 48.

⁶⁹ CPA 1/7/10. 'Charles Parker Correspondence, Personal and General'. Letter, 28 March 1958, Norah Mash (Secretary to Charles Parker) to Richard Hoggart. The following year Parker tried to garner interest in a programme idea where Hoggart, Raymond Williams and F.R. Leavis would have their heads banged together and presented with the 'rediscovery' of the 'oral tradition'. See Whitehead, The Third Programme, p. 89.

⁷⁰ Beginning with CPA 2/90/23. 'Centre 42: Performance'. Letter, 25 July 1958, Charles Parker to Arnold Wesker.

⁷¹ 'Roots (1959), set in Norfolk, portrays the effects of Ronnie Khan's infectious idealism in his fiancée, Beatie Bryant, daughter of an agricultural labourer; she returns to her family for a visit, full of his praises and his notions. In the last act Beatie is playfully trying to stir her family to some intellectual exertion while awaiting Ronnie's visit, when a letter arrives from him breaking off their engagement; after her initial despair, Beatie finds her own voice as she attacks her family for its acceptance of the third-rate and the dull, and realizes triumphantly that she is no longer quoting Ronnie'. Margaret Drabble and Jenny Stringer (eds), The Concise Oxford Companion to English Literature, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 1991, p. 607. See below, p. 242-3.

He complained that the play had been too critical in denigrating superficial working-class preferences for commercial 'tat' in favour of '*quality*' material such as the music of Bizet. Parker suggested to Wesker that he had played into the hands of 'an intellectual Royal Court audience only too ready to accept your anger at the expense of your compassion while hugging to themselves the comfortable feeling that these uncouths did not significantly touch their own humanity at any point'.⁷² Elaborating on his own concept of a popular culture, he told him that 'The Horror of the pop/song/comic/TV serial Commercial culture is a nightmare of my own but I am not so sure that the people aren't right in rejecting "The High Culture" alternative which is all that is available to them'. He complained that in the over-emphasis he gave to the intellectual at the expense of the worker, Wesker missed a vital point, 'that corrupt and moronic though the common people are seemingly becoming ... only in the common people can the true work be rooted, the true tradition rediscovered and re-informed'. The playwright defended his integrity as well as the meanings of his drama and targets by relying on the authenticity of his own roots. In a sly rebuke to Parker he claimed to have resisted the romantic 'Salt of the Earth' portrayal: 'I come from the working class and I know all their glories but I know their faults also, and this play was written for them ... It was aimed at the muck-pushers for pushing the third rate and at them for receiving it. It must have been obvious that I saw these people as warm and worthwhile'.⁷³

⁷² CPA 2/90/23. Letter, 3 July 1959, Charles Parker to Arnold Wesker.

⁷³ CPA 2/90/23. Letter, 8 July 1959, Arnold Wesker to Charles Parker. My emphasis. See also his 'Note to Actors and Producers' in The Arnold Wesker Trilogy: Chicken Soup With Barley; Roots and I'm Talking About Jerusalem, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1966, p. 7.

Subsequently, Parker and Wesker worked together on the Centre 42 project which is dealt with in the next chapter. The context for that work and the nature of the issues discussed in their exchange of letters was that of the intensifying post-war debate about the debilitating effects of mass culture, that 'Educated people are forever asking other educated people, in a worried tone of voice, questions which amount to "what do you think about popular culture?" (or "mass culture" or "popular art" or "the mass media", terms commonly interchanged)'.⁷⁴ Despite the contribution of Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams, these were of course questions that concealed abiding fears and assumptions about the tastes and nature of the 'mob'. Yet, as in the seminal work of these two figures, and in the discourses of the Folk Revival, Parker identified and validated what was *acceptable* and authentic about working-class life in the face of the threat of commercial culture. The Ballads and their theorisation were offered therefore as part of a social mission, an intervention in the face of cultural decline: 'We only have a few years. We must act quickly ... I recently visited a local prison to organise some folk-singing for the inmates. They were mostly young and with strong dialects. When they started singing, however, it was with this wretched Mid-Atlantic dialect that the disc-jockeys put over'.⁷⁵

In their *proper* unaffected speech, working-class people exhibited a quality and an innate creativity. Once recognised, and in tandem with 'the fundamental potential of the new technology' of the media, this creativity promised 'a popular

⁷⁴ Geoffrey Cannon, 'The Arts in Society: Pop Culture and Society', *New Society*, No.55, 17 October 1963, p. 23.

⁷⁵ Mike Coe, 'The Value of Dialect', *Redbrick* (University of Birmingham Student Newspaper), 17 October 1962, p. 6.

cultural renaissance of Elizabethan proportions'.⁷⁶ Alongside, if not superseding the Folk Revival, this conjunction offered a reinvigoration of a common culture for the modern age. Thus, 'The essential genius of tape recorded actuality is it seems to me in its insistent reassertion of the oral tradition and the use of language which gives us back a type of truly popular poetry'.⁷⁷ This implied a reappraisal of the identification of English, as a subject, with the literary tradition and of the way in which educational imperatives actually *inhibited* word-of-mouth communication. Indeed, the proper use of the media in recognising this authenticity was a didactic one, to 'direct the people back to their oral traditions, their real experiences, not the synthetic ones put over by the mass media'.⁷⁸ Here Parker deploys the Leavisite reference to a mythical moment of the organic community which serves as a model for all that was possible, underlined by the consistency of the qualities he found in local accents, dialects and the language of work. It was even present in the talk of that contemporary 'problem' category, the teenager. In On the Edge he was surprised to find that this group could not be dismissed for talking 'that mid-Atlantic Americanese of pop' implied by their 'colonisation' by Carnaby Street or Denmark Street. Rather, 'their language is still akin to the language of the traditional ballads (and a young woman was a 'bird' long before Sir Philip Sidney, while Ben Johnson writes of having a rumble!)'.⁷⁹ It was this continuum that underlined the essential humanity and culture of ordinary people, 'men and women so strongly imbued with

⁷⁶ CPA 1/6/8. Parker, 'Social Change in the 50s and 60s', p. 2.

⁷⁷ CPA 1/3/1/7. Letter, 20 November 1962, Charles Parker to Geoffrey Hodson (London County Council Education Officer's Department), p. 2.

⁷⁸ Coe, 'The Value of Dialect', p. 6.

⁷⁹ Charles Parker, 'Sleevenotes', On The Edge, Topic Records, TSCD 806, 1999 (first issued 1970), no page.

a sense of history, of a long struggle shared, and above all who could talk brilliantly, and with an overwhelming sense of their real importance as human beings'.⁸⁰

One way of accounting for the appreciative critical reception of Parker's work was its status *qua* radio and for its privileging of the *word*. Of all the modern media, radio as a form, and a practice directed by Reitheian values, accorded with a particularly Puritan approach to culture. Reflecting on contemporary prejudices, veteran documentary filmmaker John Grierson observed that in outlets such as The Times, the potential and achievement of television was regularly sniffed at, implying 'that "steam radio" is a purer medium altogether, with "therapeutic and restorative" powers to which television cannot aspire'.⁸¹ Essentially iconoclastic, this kind of rhetoric was echoed by generations of Leavisites - amongst others - in their attitude towards the modern 'mechanical' media and commercial culture in the form of cinema, popular magazines, newspapers and advertising. As Leavis' collaborator Denys Thompson wrote: 'Pictures are a coarse medium, and as Sir George Barnes has noted, "in a picture age the use of language must be coarsened"'.⁸²

The preference for radio by the cultured as *the* acceptable technological medium was articulated in reactions to publication of the BBC report of 1969, Broadcasting in the Seventies.⁸³ For many, this document heralded the end of the great age of sound broadcasting. With familiarly Puritan overtones, oral historian George Ewart Evans later commented that: 'Television was now completely in the

⁸⁰ Charles Parker, 'Sleevenotes', The Big Hewer, Topic Records, TSCD 804, 1999 (first issued 1966), no page.

⁸¹ John Grierson, 'Grierson on Television', Contrast: The Television Quarterly, Vol.2, No.4. Summer 1963, p. 220.

⁸² Denys Thompson, 'Preface' in David Holbrook, English For Maturity: English in the Secondary School, Cambridge University Press, London, 1961, p. vii.

⁸³ Broadcasting in the Seventies, British Broadcasting Corporation, London, 1969.

saddle and the Third Programme was effectively scrapped. Before long it would have only the occasional feature and would be filled with music. The *word* was being demoted'.⁸⁴ The institutional and cultural disaster precipitated by the report was sketched in human terms with Parker playing a central and symbolic role when he was prematurely 'retired' by the BBC in 1972 as a direct result of these changes.

His ousting generated a considerable amount of protest. Unions, celebrities and academics voiced their support as well as journalists who constructed the arguments of his case around wider attempts to stem the decline in cultural standards. The case was even raised in the House of Commons and discussed in these terms. It was suggested that Parker's 'main fault seems to be that he wishes to go on producing creative programmes rather than being a cog in a machine creating mass-produced ones'.⁸⁵ Several notables signed a letter of protest in The Times: Peter Abbs, Fred Inglis, G.H. Bantock, Ben Morris, Kenyon Calthrop, Denys Thompson, David Holbrook, George Ewart Evans and Stuart Hall. They wrote that 'As writers concerned with education, culture and the mass media, we question the wisdom and justice of this decision'.⁸⁶ They argued that via his career and particular concern with vernacular speech, Parker had shown what radio could achieve as a creative medium. The ballads provided 'a valuable body of materials which are being employed more and more extensively in our schools to reveal, among other things, the power of the spoken word'.

⁸⁴ George Ewart Evans, Spoken History, Faber and Faber, London, 1987, p. 144. His emphasis.

⁸⁵ Phillip Whitehead, 'Oral Answers', 20 December 1972, Parliamentary Debates: House of Commons Reports, 5th Series, Volume 848, House of Commons Official Report, London, HMSO, 1972, p. 1308.

⁸⁶ Peter Abbs, Fred Inglis, G.H. Bantock, Ben Morris, Kenyon Calthrop, Denys Thompson, David Holbrook, George Ewart Evans, Stuart M. Hall, (Letters to the Editor) 'Leaving the BBC', The Times, 15 November 1972, p. 17.

Endorsements such as these temper any tendency to dismiss Parker's perception of the 'extraordinariness' of a railwayman's cry of 'hey-Cleaner' or 'stentorian "Charlie"' as idiosyncratic or even eccentric. Not entirely exceptional, his aestheticisation of working-class life and speech can be placed in the context of changing attitudes towards the nature of spoken English in the post 1945 era, an expression of the *mentalités* of 'The Age of the Common Man'.⁸⁷ As Raymond Williams has suggested: 'A definition of language is always implicitly or explicitly, a definition of human beings in the world'.⁸⁸

It is somewhat surprising that social historians of language have little to say about this era. In his social histories of language for instance, Tony Crowley portrays the way in which cultural prejudices have underwritten idealist and aesthetic notions of speech. The 'masses' have been constructed and objectified as those who 'make noise but are not counted as engaging in discourse because the noises they make are not part of the "standard language" system'.⁸⁹ His work has focussed on the pre-war years and he says little of direct substance about the post-war world other than to acknowledge that there have been twenty years of useful debate about the relative merits of languages of class and culture, and so on. In fact, some educationalists in post-war Britain continued to champion ideas of 'proper'

⁸⁷ However, it is more usual to find rural manners the subject of celebration, e.g., the work of George Ewart Evans but also in the writing of a progressive teacher like Sybil Marshall. See An Experiment in Education, Cambridge University Press, London, 1972 (first published 1963) in which she draws attention to 'the similarity between the colloquialisms so common to us and the kind of imagery used by the poets' (p. 135).

⁸⁸ Raymond Williams, Marxism and Literature, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p. 21.

⁸⁹ Tony Crowley, The Politics of Discourse: The Standard Language Question in British Cultural Debates, Macmillan, Houndmills, Basingstoke, 1989, pp. 220 and 207-257. See also Tony Crowley (ed.), Proper English? Readings in Language, History and Cultural Identity, Routledge, London, 1991; Dick Leith, A Social History of English, Routledge, London, 1997 (Second edition) and Gerry Knowles, A Social History of English, Routledge, London, 1983.

speech in the confused manner explored in his work. Standard English was still offered as innately *superior* to any other accent, amongst which 'the urban accents are the worst offender against good speech, especially in the large cities which have grown up as a result of the industrial revolution'.⁹⁰ Such evaluations were based on a pathological fantasy. 'Urban' dialects - for which read 'working-class' - were felt to be false, lazy, harsh and ugly. They were the products of environments where shouting in smoky atmospheres has been required, where the hurried pace of city life has demanded speedy communication and thus a diminution of form and meaning. Amongst those who expressed scepticism about such conclusions were progressive and radical teachers of English, receptive as they were to the more relativistic arguments of modern linguistics as they filtered into the educational sphere. A fuller account is given in Chapter Six, but in need of acknowledgement here are the effects of the Education Act of 1944. These include: the attendant reappraisal of pedagogical imperatives, the identification of working-class children as both 'culturally deprived' and as the inheritors of 'very real values of their own, values which are perhaps essential to civilization, and yet which do not flourish in other reaches of society'.⁹¹

Felicitously, The Ballad of John Axon was broadcast in the same year that Basil Bernstein first advanced his sociology of speech and formulation of 'elaborated' and 'restricted' codes.⁹² This categorisation was based upon analyses of two types of family unit and approaches to the raising of children, although these

⁹⁰ Prudence Hill, 'English Speech Today', Use of English, Vol.IV, No.3, Spring 1953, p. 135.

⁹¹ Brian Jackson and Dennis Marsden, Education and the Working Class: Some General Themes Raised By a Study of 88 Working-Class Children in a Northern Industrial City, Penguin, Hamondsworth, 1973 (first published 1962, revised 1966), p. 245.

types had broader social application: 'Roughly speaking, the elaborated code is middle-class and the restricted code is working-class'.⁹³ In short, the elaborated code is abstract, explicit and independent of context. In contrast, the restricted code is descriptive, based upon narrative and avoids analysis and abstraction. It is predictable, simple and limited in its meaning and variety. Context bound, it relies upon the understanding of speaker and listener, and 'arises whenever the culture of a group emphasizes *we* rather than *I* and occurs to reinforce social relationships and create social solidarity'.⁹⁴

Ostensibly, this work was offered as an observation on the continued and general academic failure of working-class children. Bernstein suggested that this group was disempowered by the need to negotiate between the 'restricted' code of the home and the 'elaborated' code of school and the academic world - which favoured the middle-classes. These ideas 'generated considerable controversy', meeting with 'a storm of criticism'.⁹⁵ Described as 'perhaps naive' in his approach, certainly vague in method, Bernstein's conclusions were taken by some as attributing the failure of working-class children to a collective cognitive defect.⁹⁶ This was particularly attractive to those of the Right who were ill-disposed towards egalitarian impulses and particular modes of education designed to alleviate the 'cultural deficit' of a class-ridden society. For them, Bernstein codified and

⁹² Basil Bernstein, 'Some Sociological Determinants of Perception: An Enquiry into Sub-cultural Differences', British Journal of Sociology, Vol. 9, 1958, pp. 159-74.

⁹³ Peter Burke, 'Introduction' in Peter Burke and Roy Porter (eds), The Social History of Language, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987, p. 6.

⁹⁴ Ivan Reid, Sociological Perspectives on School and Education, Open Books, Shepton Maller, 1984, p. 183.

⁹⁵ Peter Burke, The Social History of Language, p. 6.

⁹⁶ Lucy Burke, Tony Crowley and Alan Girvin (eds), The Routledge Language and Cultural Theory Reader, Routledge, London, 2000, p. 444.

supported familiar prejudices about the low intelligence of the majority. For the Left, Bernstein failed to take account of these prejudices, provided a superficial analysis of class, and over-emphasised the values of the 'elaborated' code at the expense of those of the 'restricted' - not least of all in his choice of terms.

Predicated upon an analogy of 'restricted' and 'elaborated' with 'oral' and 'literate', Parker's was one of the earliest voices raised in protest at the implications of Bernstein's ideas, and on at least one occasion he shared a platform with him.⁹⁷ While Brian Jackson and Dennis Marsden considered that what is presented in working-class speech is '*difference*' rather than 'restriction', Parker advanced a more value-laden argument.⁹⁸ His own position was articulated in the title of one paper, which asked 'Why Can't the Educated Speak English?'⁹⁹ As we have seen, in his celebration of its 'realism', veracity and lack of abstraction, his validation of working-class speech was based upon the very aspects that Bernstein highlighted as social impediments yet were taken as qualitative defects.¹⁰⁰

The nature of Parker's contribution to debates about society and language in education was initially recognised and encouraged by individual schoolteachers. They sought copies of his work and advice about how *properly* to go about investigating talk with children: i.e. was 'pop' an adequate substitute for 'folk'?

⁹⁷ Charles Parker, 'Spoken Language as We Find It', pp. 18-21 and Basil Bernstein, 'Speech in the Home', pp. 11-13, N.A.T.E. Bulletin: Some Aspects of Oracy, Vol.II, No.2, Summer 1965.

⁹⁸ Jackson and Marsden, Education and the Working Class, p. 233.

⁹⁹ CPA 1/3/3/1. Charles Parker, 'Why Can't the Educated Speak English?', mss., 1969.

¹⁰⁰ Bernstein's papers were collected in Class, Codes and Control, Volume 1: Theoretical Studies Towards a Sociology of Language, Routledge, London, 1971. Those usually cited as antagonistic towards Bernstein's ideas are William Labov, in Language in the Inner City: Studies in the Black English Vernacular, Blackwell, Oxford, 1972 and Harold Rosen in Language and Class: A Critical Look at the Theories of Basil Bernstein, Falling Wall Press, London, Bristol, 1972. Interestingly the latter was first delivered as a paper at History Workshop No. 6 (1972), and cites Parker's work as an idea of what can be done in exploring the value of working-class language.

(No! - given that a folk lyric had an 'organic' relationship with speech in a way that *ersatz* pop did not).¹⁰¹ The London County Council was one of the first to invite Parker to talk about the Ballad technique to local teachers at a 1963 conference.¹⁰² It disseminated his ideas through their newsletter, later drawing attention to the issue of his series on record as a useful teaching aid.¹⁰³ He became a regular guest at the conferences of the National Association of Teachers of English, travelling all over the country to speak to its local groups.¹⁰⁴ Alongside 'acceptable' works of working-class origin or those detailing this experience his series wended its way onto examination syllabuses and into classroom practice. The Schools Council reported that one Fourth-Year English Syllabus included topics such as 'coming to terms with the world of work', recommending that after listening to The Ballad of John Axon, the creation of a Radio Ballad would be a suitable exercise.¹⁰⁵ As a teacher himself, he delivered classes for the WEA from 1964-1971 and led courses on his work and ideas at Trent Polytechnic for the benefit of trainee teachers.¹⁰⁶ He was also Visiting Lecturer in the nascent field of Media Studies at the Polytechnic of Central London,

¹⁰¹ CPA 1/3/1/7. Letter, 17 December 1964. Gillian M Fraser, Keys Warren School, Plumstead to Charles Parker in response to a talk to Sixth formers given by him on the BBC 17 November 1964. Also CPA 1/3/1/10. Letter, 28 May 1965. Brian Mitchell of 'The English Club' (Faversham Grammar School, Kent) to Charles Parker.

¹⁰² At Pulteney Teachers Centre, 12 April 1963.

¹⁰³ E.g., CPA 1/3/1/7. Letter, 3 March 1964, RWJ Keeble (London County Council Education Officer's Department) to Charles Parker. Discusses demand for copies of the Ballads for use in schools. When the Ballads were released on record by Argo, the Department drew the attention of teachers to them. Letter: 27 June 1966, Geoffrey Hodson to Charles Parker.

¹⁰⁴ E.g. CPA 1/3/1/20/2. Charles Parker, 'The Creative Use of Language', reported by Alan Moorhouse in London Association of Teachers of English, Report on a Weekend Conference at Beatrice Webb House 19-21 May 1967 and CPA 1/3/1/20/1. Charles Parker, 'English in Practice: Aspects of Creative Expression' (mss), for Hull NATE, 11 March 1967.

¹⁰⁵ Other recommended material included Lawrence's Sons and Lovers (Morel's first job), Mervyn Jones' Potbank, Clancy Sigal's Coal is Our Life, Alan Sillitoe's Saturday Night and Sunday Morning, Sid Chaplin's The Day of The Sardine. Schools Council, An Approach Through English, Humanities for the Young School Leaver, HMSO, London, 1968, p. 7.

¹⁰⁶ See, Kenyon Calthrop and Graham Owens (eds), Teachers for Tomorrow: Diverse and Radical Views about Teacher Education, Heineman, London, 1971.

and Visiting Fellow in the Faculty of Letters and Social Sciences at University of Reading.

Parker's romanticism was such that he confessed to being racked 'with frustration every time I record a working-class speaker who gives me language with the pith and immediacy of Chaucer and Shakespeare - and then apologises for doing so. The ultimate remedy for such self-alienation can only be the root-and-branch transformation of our national culture'.¹⁰⁷ After the cancellation of the Ballad series his cultural project was one that he increasingly posed as part of a wider radical struggle on behalf of working-class identity and self-consciousness. To this end he helped establish the Birmingham and Midland Folk Centre in 1965 in order to collect and disseminate folk material. He was also a founder member of the highly popular Grey Cock Folk Club (established in 1966) in Birmingham which boasted E.P. Thompson as its honorary vice-president.¹⁰⁸ His collaboration with individuals such as MacColl, Bert Lloyd and others in the folk movement brought him into contact with Communist Party cultural analyses and in 1965 he joined a Marxist Study Group in Birmingham that was guided by critic and theorist George Thomson.¹⁰⁹

Professor of Greek at the University of Birmingham, Thomson had been a key figure in the Cultural Committee of the CPGB since the 1930s. His study group was attended by Parker's BBC colleagues such as Mary Baker and Philip Donnellan, as well as many active in the local folk movement and musicians union such as

¹⁰⁷ Charles Parker, 'Banner', New Statesman, Vol.88, No.2273, 11 October 1974, p. 517.

¹⁰⁸ Source, Mike Turner, 'The Grey Cock', Charles Parker Archive Trust Annual Report 1984.

¹⁰⁹ Parker formed a fruitful relationship with Katherine Thomson when as musical director of Birmingham's 'Clarion Singers' she had sought to produce a stage version of The Ballad of John

MacColl and Luke Kelly. Thomson lectured them on the ideas of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao. Questions of culture would be raised such as 'The great problem of aesthetics', or, 'the forms which art will take in a classless society'.¹¹⁰ MacColl led a discussion on 'Popular Songs and Political Struggle' where, not surprisingly, folksong was identified for its class-based character and 'realism'.¹¹¹

Thomson's work had a clear social and political purpose. His Marxist reading of the Classics was a world away from that of the public school tradition and the rarefied atmosphere of academia. His work was aimed at 'the people' in order to 'rescue the poet from ... scholasticism'.¹¹² His observation that 'the historian of the past is a citizen of the present', was an idea echoed in the ethos of the Party's Historian's Group and the projects of individuals such as Christopher Hill, John Saville, Eric Hobsbawm and E.P. Thompson. Parker himself became interested in the traditions of oral culture and linked his work directly to the project of 'History from Below', as identified by Thompson in an article of 1966 for the Times Literary Supplement.¹¹³ In a lecture of the same year, Parker used the occasion to argue for the establishment of a School of Urban and Industrial Studies in order to further this project.¹¹⁴ With a clear sympathy for the political aims of such work he suggested

Axon see below, pp. 268.

¹¹⁰ CPA 1/8/12/1. 'Societies and Organisations – Membership and Activity'. Charles Parker, 'Miscellaneous notes to group, meeting, 7 November 1965', p. 3.

¹¹¹ Ibid. 18 April 1966, p. 25.

¹¹² George Thomson, 'Preface to the Third Edition', Aeschylus and Athens: A Study in the Social Origins of Drama, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1966 (first published 1941), p. viii.

¹¹³ E.P. Thompson, 'History From Below', The Times Literary Supplement, No.3345, 4 April 1966, p. 279.

¹¹⁴ Later, he found a place amongst the Society of Industrial Tutors, attending various conferences on Labour History. E.g., CPA 1/3/1/3. 'Identity and the Working Class: Studies in Labour History' at University College, Swansea, 2 June 1975. Parker lectured on 'Speech, Song and the Miner'. In 1975 he was awarded the Welsh Tinplate Labour Trust Fellowship at the University College of Swansea, producing 'A Comparative Study of Attitudes to Industrial Action Among South Wales Miners, 1926, 1972-74'.

that it countered versions of history as that of 'legendary' figures, kings and queens, but it also meant countering the anonymity and abstraction of 'statistics' and 'economic' history. The value of everyday life and experience could be *recovered*, located and understood in vernacular traditions and speech but most notably through folk song. Thus, in the wealth of material presented by travellers such as Queen Caroline Styles, as recorded for the Radio Ballad The Travelling People, one was presented with the fact of 'the authentic style and poetic substance of the English Peasant ... the expression of those millions upon millions of our past ... if we ourselves are prepared to learn and sing such songs, then we can, I believe, enter imaginatively into the real experience of the past'.¹¹⁵

Such ideas met with the work of contemporary historians directly in the Radio 4 series The Long March of Everyman where, despite 'retirement', Parker was employed as 'Producer for the Voices of the People'. Raymond Williams was enlisted as a literary consultant while contributors included Asa Briggs, George Rudé, Gwyn Williams, Stuart Hall, Christopher Hill and Raphael Samuel. Running for 26 weeks, the series was conceived as 'an exploratory act of faith' into the possibility (*pace* Tolstoy) of developing a history of the 'swarm life' of society's 'unknown soldiers'. Formally, the production was conceived 'in relation to the newly developing field of "oral history" - the tape-recording of first-hand historical evidence which has tended to be overlooked by the traditional history of "great men and great events"'.¹¹⁶ Without actual recordings of historical accounts from the

¹¹⁵ CPA 1/3/1/16. Charles Parker, 'The Missing Link', p. 3.

¹¹⁶ Theo Barker, 'Appendix' in Theo Barker (ed.), The Long March of Everyman, André Deutsch/British Broadcasting Corporation, London, 1975, p. 295. The series ran on BBC Radio 4 from 21 November 1971 to 24 May 1972, repeated with an additional epilogue from 30 September

perspective of ordinary people beyond living memory, suitable material was sought in works like Dorothy Thompson's The Early Chartists (1971) and A.L. Lloyd's folk song treatises such as Come all Ye Bold Miners (1952). Folk song was sung by renowned performers, and other lines spoken by 'ordinary' people to convey the experience of those of the past.¹¹⁷

For Producer Michael Mason this programme was an attempt to *give back* to the people as a whole a sense of their history, fulfilling a need to revivify national traditions and roots that had been cut since 1945.¹¹⁸ He waxed lyrical over the technique of the series, that the marshalling of this material conveyed a 'Great Music'. Voices, music and sounds gave a historical texture, conveying an impressionistic portrait of historical events at a *micro* level. Echoing Parker, he talked of great new popular art forms developing from such work, 'This gradual emergence of Everyman's voice is something which the series must itself enact in its early programmes - and it must also show how the split between élitist poetry and common speech is a feature of later literate society rather than earlier oral tradition'.¹¹⁹ Mason's assistant Daniel Snowman suggested that a view of history 'from the bottom up' qualified a democratic pedagogical imperative that, in the hands of teachers, pupils might be allowed 'to think of the past, not as a forced diet of "Them", but as a banquet of "Us"'.¹²⁰

1972 to 24 March 1973.

¹¹⁷ Tellingly, while over 800 people were recorded for an authentic delivery of lines about ordinary experiences, 'posh BBC voices' were used for the reading of Shakespeare, Wordsworth etc. See John Carey, 'Review: Long March of Everyman', Listener, Vol. 87, No. 2249, 4 May 1971, pp. 574-5.

¹¹⁸ Michael Mason, 'The Long March of Everyman', Listener, Vol. 86, No.2225, 18 November 1971, pp. 683-4.

¹¹⁹ Mason, 'The Long March of Everyman', p. 684.

¹²⁰ Daniel Snowman, 'Writes About the Series as History', Listener Vol. 86, No.2225, 18 November 1971, p. 685.

It has been said of Raymond Williams and other 'scholarship boys' like Hoggart, Potter et al, 'that the most transformative experience of a working-class intellectual's life is often the encounter with one of the great bourgeois writers (or sometimes with a whole bourgeois genre)!'¹²¹ An inversion of this idea offers a useful generalisation about those of another intellectual tradition that, as we have seen, Hoggart himself identified as middle-class intellectuals with strong social consciences.¹²² These are the obverse of what has otherwise been described as 'an uninterrupted flow of scholars, philanthropists, politicians and others who contemplated the working class and were far from pleased with what they saw'.¹²³

It indicates something of the nature of historical class relations to note that an individual like pioneer oral historian George Ewart Evans could vividly recall (in 1987) 'My first acquaintance with the thoughts and opinions of ordinary people ... over half a century ago'.¹²⁴ Despite the apparently levelling experience of the Second World War, Philip Donnellan, who like Parker was someone of petit-bourgeois origins, said of a meeting with one Charlie Andrews of Lowestoft in 1951, that 'It was the first time I had come face to face with a working man'.¹²⁵ Although often

¹²¹ Leonard Jackson, The Dematerialisation of Karl Marx: Literature and Marxist Theory, Longman, London, 1994, p. 212.

¹²² See Chapter One, part i.

¹²³ Rosen, Language and Class, p. 1.

¹²⁴ Evans, Spoken History, p. 1.

¹²⁵ Quoted in W. Stephen Gilbert, 'Let the People Speak' (Obituary: Philip Donnellan), Guardian, 1 March 1999, p. 16. Peripherally involved with the original Ballads, Donnellan developed three of them for television - 'Shoals of Herring' (1972), 'The Fight Game' and 'The Big Hewer' (1973). Working mainly in television his concerns echoed Parker's and he continued the venerable documentary tradition of John Grierson through his films. Private Faces (1962) caused a fearful reaction in his boss, Grace Wyndham Goldie and the film was suppressed. It was a study of a Durham miner who epitomised the qualities that Donnellan valued but which worried his bosses. He described his subject as 'an absolutely stunning man, eloquent, committed, humane, unfaultable in terms of his integrity, his stance in the community, his conscious sense of having learnt from life what life had to tell him, his atheism, his socialism'. (Quoted in Gilbert). For an account of Donnellan's work see Steve Mardy, 'The Imprint of the Individual Mind: Philip Donnellan' in Moving On: Changing

geographical, this kind of encounter leads to a kind of mental journey outside of a metropolitan mindset - George Orwell's being the most celebrated. Parker himself traced a move that had been made by his inspiration and colleague in the BBC Features Department Louis MacNeice.¹²⁶ In the Thirties, the poet had taken up a post in Classics at the University of this 'hazy city', discovering that Birmingham had its own refreshing intellectual character, 'free of the London trade-mark'.¹²⁷ His students were drawn from the locality and he found that they lacked the political obsessions of his Oxbridge peers, particularly the fashionable *ouvriérisme*: 'coming from the proletariat themselves, they were conscious of the weaknesses of the Prolet-Cult'. This encounter challenged his inveterate snobbery, and he found that it 'reconciled me to ordinary people'.¹²⁸

Nonetheless, Parker echoed the romanticism of Prolet-Cult in *his* reconciliation with the common man, in turn producing a number of contradictions and problems in his work and theory. Although his thinking often appears quite idiosyncratic, it drew upon the cultural criticism produced by Leavis and Marx and their followers. Parker's ideas thus offer suggestions about the limits of both traditions, and how they informed practices and projects concerned with the culture, history and politics of the working classes. Firstly, consider the notion of 'giving voice' to 'the people', of presenting them with their 'authentic' culture and

Cultures, Changing Times (Proceedings of the Association of Media Communication and Cultural Studies Conference, Sheffield, 1998), AMCCS, Sheffield, 1998, pp. 86-94.

¹²⁶ Parker knew MacNeice and was a first-hand source of information about him and his work for one researcher. CPA 1/7/10. Letter, 7 December, 1962, Charles Parker to Vicki Ui.

¹²⁷ Louis MacNeice, *The Strings are False: An Unfinished Autobiography*, Faber and Faber, London, 1996 (first published 1965), p. 154.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.* p. 145.

traditions, a project that still has considerable currency.¹²⁹ The question is: what is it exactly that is recovered and given back? While hundreds of hours of tape might have been recorded for the Ballads and other projects, and while Parker might have sat at the feet of his respondents, his material underwent intensive scrutiny in order to identify what was valuable or significant in order to illuminate greater truths. As one correspondent wrote, 'I agree that the speech of the working man for instance, is often richer and more alive than that of the banker and academic, but it can also be bloody boring, stupid, bigoted, restricted to a rhetoric which is fine for a day or two, but live with it for twenty years and it begins to get a bit hollow'.¹³⁰

The arbitrariness of the 'objectivity' and romanticism brought to the theory and practice of the Ballads was readily apparent from the outset. Having collated over forty hours of interviews for The Ballad of John Axon, MacColl recalled that 'the more we went over the same ground the better the actuality became'.¹³¹ Interviews were actually *reconducted* in order to better elicit the right tone and turn of phrase. The bad faith involved here is reiterated in Laurence Aston's recent guide to the series. Considering the ubiquity of original testimony of 'ordinary' people in contemporary media, he writes that 'such "eye-witness" reporting is inevitably processed through an editorial filter and can often distort or misrepresent the subject's own frame of reference. Yet when it is sensitively done it gives the listener

¹²⁹ E.g., Owen Ashton and Stephen Roberts, The Victorian Working-Class Writer, Cassell, London, 1999, p. 2.

¹³⁰ CPA 1/6/7. Letter, 30 May 1974, John Sansick to Charles Parker.

¹³¹ Ewan MacColl, 'Sleevenotes', The Ballad of John Axon, Topic Records, TSCD 801, 1999 (first issued 1965), no page.

or viewer the feeling of being addressed personally by the speaker'.¹³² This begs the question what constitutes 'sensitivity' and what precepts guide such approaches?

Parker's approach was entirely consistent with that of the British documentary tradition in the cinema. For John Grierson the documentary form was *creative* in the same manner as music hall, Ballet, post-impressionist painting or the blank verse of Shakespeare, but could claim something *more* as a result of its subject matter: 'when we come to documentary we come to the *actual world*, to the world of the streets, of the tenements and the factories, the living people and the observation of living people ... We have to give creative shapes to it, we have to profound about it before our documentary art is as good or better than the art of the studio'.¹³³ He wrote that it was important to make a distinction between 'a method which describes only the surface values of a subject' and that which 'more explosively reveals the reality of it. You photograph the natural life, but you also, by your own juxtaposition of detail, create an interpretation of it'.¹³⁴

Such work was not about mere reproduction but about the *correct* kind of mediation and interpretation of the world. This was based upon the notion that the subject - i.e. 'ordinary people', was itself the guarantor of truth, qualifying a particularly prescriptive interpretation of the world. As Parker revealed,

I am concerned politically and culturally at this moment with expressing what I consider to be positive and assertive and revolutionary in working-

¹³² Laurence Aston, 'The Radio-Ballads: 1957-1964', 'Sleevenotes', The Ballad of John Axon et al, Topic Records, TSCD 801, 1999, no page.

¹³³ John Grierson, 'Untitled Lecture on Documentary (1927-33)', in Ian Aitken (ed.), The Documentary Film Movement: An Anthology, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1998, pp. 76-7.

¹³⁴ John Grierson, 'First Principles of Documentary' in Forsyth Hardy (ed., and compiler), Grierson on Documentary, Faber and Faber, London, 1966, p. 148 (first published in Cinema Quarterly,

class experience. I consider that the role of any artist seriously committed to the working class is that of eliciting from the working class in its many aspects those areas in which it triumphantly demonstrates the potential for a true proletarian consciousness and culture which section of the working class are capable of creating.¹³⁵

Parker's argument here is that 'criteria for selection' must be applied, for it is not possible to appreciate the nature of consciousness from hours of unedited speech gathered in research. An idea of political consciousness is distilled from that speech, 'which may be ahead of the everyday awareness of the working-class audience you then play it to'.¹³⁶ Assuming the benign authority of the theorist and convinced of the essential qualities of working-classness, he dismissed 'other' interpretations of life and the world, the understanding and perception of banality and the commonplace, the everyday contingent existence that he termed 'the manipulated awareness of the working class that just wants a quite life'.¹³⁷

I think that what is illuminating about this rhetoric is the manner in which it echoes the way in which the radical work of the 1930s was framed. More interestingly, the reiteration of these ideas had a currency in a milieu that in general remains largely unexamined.¹³⁸ I am thinking here of a post-1968 coterie of

Winter 1932, Spring 1933, Spring 1934).

¹³⁵ Charles Parker, 'The Dramatic Actuality of Working-Class Speech', p. 102.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.* p. 103.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ Although, see: Geoff Andrews, 'Intellectuals and the CP Leadership in the 1970s' in Geoff Andrews, Nina Fishman and Kevin Morgan (eds), Opening the Books: Essays on the Social and Cultural History of the British Communist Party, Pluto, London, 1995, p. 226. Also, and largely intemperate, Blake Baker, The Far Left: An Expose of the Extreme Left in Britain, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1981. There is clearly more to be said about this era and the political/cultural factions that informed movements such as Militant and the SWP. Post-'68 'dogmatic' radicalism was recognisable enough to be parodied in Malcolm Bradbury's novel The History Man (1975) and the popular BBC TV series Citizen Smith (1977-80).

dissipated and myopic radical 'organisations' such as the Radical Student Alliance and various 'Trotskyist groups' such as the International Socialists, the International Marxist Group and later the Workers' Revolutionary Party, and so on.¹³⁹ Curiously, this movement was highly influential in the field of alternative theatre, which is discussed in the next chapter. By the early 1970s Parker was involved with his own radical theatrical troupe 'Banner Theatre', now a 'marxist of the maoist persuasion'.¹⁴⁰

Parker's ideas about working-class consciousness, shared with many other groups, were emblematic of the prescriptive and didactic 'vanguardism' decried by E.P. Thompson (see pp. 23-24). Yet a problem that Thompson himself does not escape in his work is the issue of how particular 'experiences' are understood and recognised as politically valuable. Parker's perception of language, as with the discourse of the Folk Revival that validated genuine working-class creativity and consciousness, was the result of his concentration on particularly 'authentic' working-class sites. While they branched out into coverage of the disabled, travellers, boxers and 'youth' it is noteworthy that the first Ballads dealt with highly traditional, masculine, working-class occupations: in rail, labouring, fishing and mining. At a time of substantial change in the nature of work these were ossified and romanticised for the evidence they provided of a genuine and enduring working-class consciousness. These professions involve a highly visible and self-evident form of labour, the aestheticisation of which enjoins with a strong lineage. William

¹³⁹ CPA 1/8/12/2 contains the Programme of the Communist Party of Great Britain (Marxist-Leninist) (No date, probably 1964), an offshoot of the CPGB. It proposes various ideas for the promulgation of a proper proletarian art reflecting 'proletarian ideas', resistance to consumerism and 'coca-colonisation' of the UK by the USA.

Morris for instance said that 'the thing which I understand by real art is the expression by man of his pleasure in labour.'¹⁴¹ At George Thomson's Marxist Study Group, Parker learned that 'Art is a form of mental labour, and is creative in the sense that all human labour is creative i.e. creates value'.¹⁴² As discussed previously there are limits to this vision. Of course it validates the necessary activity of a majority yet at the same time identifies *this* as the defining character of life, self-evident from the term '*working-classes*' which itself becomes limited in its application.

Similarly, Parker's claims to validate 'experience' are limited. What resulted was a constant disavowal of individuality - literally so in the fact that respondents whose voices comprise the actuality of the Radio Ballads remained uncredited and generally anonymous. When figures such as fishermen Sam Lerner and Ronnie Balls were lauded, it was as representative men. Their idiomatic expressions became examples of 'collective' expression, not their own property as such.¹⁴³ This was a characteristic of the series that drew some criticism as it drew to a close, that 'everyday independent-minded statement' when merged with folk-song 'transform the speakers from individuals into absolute representations of the working-classes'.¹⁴⁴ At one of the founding events of Oral History, Parker told an audience that included Raphael Samuel, Paul Thompson, George Ewart Evans and John Saville about his methodology and the promise held in technological innovation: 'I believe very passionately, as a working producer, working in sound, that the points

¹⁴⁰ Fisher, 'Charles Parker: Aspects of a Pioneer', p. 24.

¹⁴¹ Quoted by Holdsworth, 'Songs Of The People', p. 48.

¹⁴² CPA 1/8/12/1. Charles Parker, 'Miscellaneous notes to group meeting 7 January 1967', no page.

¹⁴³ E.g. Parker, The Tape Recorder and the Oral Tradition.

at which language takes off are the points at which in fact the person is speaking not for himself but for a group'.¹⁴⁵

Comments from interviewees such as railwayman Alec Watts that 'It's in his blood' lent weight to attempts to theorise the organic connection of work, language and authentic cultural form. Singing the Fishing presented men 'speaking at every level of a realistic engagement with a tough environment, and of the vital bond between man and fish'.¹⁴⁶ It helped that characters such as 84 year-old Sam Lerner, who first went to sea in 1892, maintained a contact with a disappeared 'authentic' past, and professions that seem elemental in wrestling with nature and wresting material from nature. In one instance Parker opined that the ability of vernacular speech to convey experience related to its resonance with the 'physical vibrations of the soul'.¹⁴⁷ He recalled how he and MacColl had once chanced upon a man sharpening knives in an East End workshop, his singing voice resonating with the sound and tones created by his tools and work. The vernacular 'right down to the elements of individual vowels and consonants, still vibrate, with a sensual oral charge that enjoins shared experience, and which is still lacking in the best of middle class utterance'.¹⁴⁸ This is a notion straight from George Thomson's Marxism and Poetry. Here, he suggested that songs and poetry were closely related, arguing that 'human rhythm originated from the use of tools'.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁴ 'Anon', 'Heroes and Stereotypes', The Times, 15 June 1963, p. 5.

¹⁴⁵ Charles Parker quoted in 'The Interview in Social History' (Conference March 1972), Oral History, No.4, 1973, p. 123 ff

¹⁴⁶ Charles Parker, 'Sleevenotes', Singing the Fishing, Topic Records, TSCD803, 1999 (first issued 1966), no page.

¹⁴⁷ CPA 1/6/7. Transcript of conversation/interview, Charles Parker and Peter Abbs, 13 March 1977, p. 32.

¹⁴⁸ Parker, 'Social Change in the 50s and 60s', p. 8.

¹⁴⁹ George Thomson, Marxism and Poetry, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1945, p.15.

For Parker the vernacular was 'non-literary' speech, which for him meant that it was not related to Received Pronunciation or to Standard English. This interpretation is in turn based upon a misconception. Parker, as others have done, conflates prestige modes of speech directly with the printed word, an interpretation which simply does not obtain. A useful illustration here is provided by any consideration of literary greats - the poetry of Keats or Wordsworth, for example, and how the individual reads it - whether silently or aloud. Referring to his social position, Blackwood's Magazine once labelled John Keats the 'Cockney poet' but his works give no sign of the fact that he spoke the language of the city.¹⁵⁰ More recently, Tony Harrison in one tirade directed at the assertion that '*Poetry's the speech of kings*' writes, '*You can tell the Receivers where to go/(and not aspirate it) once you know/Wordsworth's matter/water are full rhymes*'.¹⁵¹

Underwriting Parker's identification of a realism in working-class speech, 'an unassailable touchstone to the truth', was an organicism, that is a faith in an essential connection between speaker and utterance.¹⁵² On this basis, and in privileging the oral over the written, he repeated an abiding prejudice common in Western thought that even as his ideas cohered, was being deconstructed by a range of radical French theorists.¹⁵³ For instance, in work such as De la Grammatologie and L'Écriture et la Différence (both 1967), Jacques Derrida explored the ways in

¹⁵⁰ For a discussion, see Robert McCrum, Robert MacNeil and William Cran, The Story of English: New and Revised Edition, Faber and Faber, London, 1992, p. 298.

¹⁵¹ Tony Harrison, 'Them and [uz]' in Tony Harrison, Selected Poems, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1987, p. 123.

¹⁵² Quoted in Coe, 'The Value of Dialect', p. 7.

¹⁵³ Also a materialist analysis of language appeared in the work of Lev Vygotsky which was translated into English in 1962. See Eugenia Hanfmann and Gertrud Vakar (eds, transl.), Thought and Language, M.I.T. Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1962. Vygotsky's work was mentioned by Raymond Williams in Marxism and Literature.

which philosophers from Plato, in 'Phaedrus', through to Enlightenment thinkers like Rousseau and after, in Nietzsche and Ferdinand de Saussure, displayed a *phonologism* and even 'contempt ... for writing'.¹⁵⁴ Rousseau, for instance, contended that writing is no more than incidental to speech, which has been accorded a veracity and integrity denied the book and literary culture.¹⁵⁵ The suggestion is that in speech one is offered a moment of authenticity, a unity of word, thought and world and 'Somehow we think that what is said is more true or authentic if it is actually being said by someone we can see saying it. We think that speech offers transparent and unified meaning, whereas writing must be secondary, since it cannot offer such certainty'.¹⁵⁶

In relation to this tradition there is a sense of speech as having an *aesthetic* quality denied in writing which is imitative 'of the gestures, of the live voice and of ... present "passion"'.¹⁵⁷ The written has none of the 'effervescence, the effusion, the incantation, the singular vibration of a spoken word'.¹⁵⁸ In an English context, even Leavisism - with its preoccupation with the 'literary' - evinced some of this prejudice. Leavis' view of the organic community was directed by a belief in a common creativity in which 'the cultivation of the art of speech was ... essential to the old popular culture'.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁴ Michel Harr, 'The Play of Nietzsche in Derrida' in David Wood (ed.), *Derrida: A Critical Reader*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1992, p. 58. In the same edition, see also Robert Bernasconi, 'No More Stories, Good or Bad: Derrida's Reading of Rousseau's "Essay on the origin of languages"'.

¹⁵⁵ In his 'Essay on the Origin of Languages' (1781) and 'The Discourse on Inequality' (1755)

¹⁵⁶ Alan Finlayson, 'Language' in Fidelam Ashe, Alan Finlayson, Moya Lloyd, Iain MacKenzie, James Martin and Shane O'Neil, *Contemporary Social and Political Theory: An Introduction*, Open University Press, Buckingham and Philadelphia, 1999, p. 63.

¹⁵⁷ Harr, 'The Play of Nietzsche in Derrida', p. 58.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.* p. 58.

¹⁵⁹ F.R. Leavis, *Culture and Environment*, p. 2. In this Puritan lineage the opening of 'The Gospel of St John' is resonant, 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God' (ch.1, v.1). This is surely a source of the iconoclasm and anti-visual attitude discussed above.

The value of citing Derrida here is in the way that he highlights the essential misconception behind Parker's values. The speech/writing distinction was based upon the binarism of nature/culture, yet of course speech itself, and the ideas and consciousness it expresses, is *always* social.¹⁶⁰ Parker's organicism proves to be doubly problematic when he theorises about the manner in which technology might be enlisted as somehow conducive to the invigoration of 'Oral' culture. This problem is consequent upon those *a priori* notions of 'proletarian' consciousness and an underlying idealism. As his theory progressed in this area, Parker made much use of the ideas of Marshall McLuhan, particularly the concept of how the literate 'Gutenberg Galaxy' was in the process of transmutation and that, 'The new electronic interdependence recreates the world in the image of a global village'.¹⁶¹ It is a considerable leap to understanding such a complex in the same manner *as* a pre-industrial village however, and in anticipation of the manner in which the electronic age heralded new modes of being, Parker saw a model for them in the 'pre-literary' 'tactile modes' of communication and social communications. Thus 'consciousness' was not a description of responses to being-in-the-world and its awareness but something more abiding or at least (re) constructable.¹⁶²

The implicit problems of this outlook are dealt with by Walter J. Ong. In the modern era of mass communications, consciousness itself changes. Certainly, any understanding of it within a literate society implies a fundamental change from its nature within a truly oral culture. Telephone, radio, television and other technologies

¹⁶⁰ For a useful precis of the issues see Jessica Munns and Gita Rajan, A Cultural Studies Reader: History, Theory, Practice, Longman, London, 1995, p. 115.

¹⁶¹ Marshall McLuhan, The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1962, p. 31.

of recording and transmission have initiated the age of 'secondary orality' which despite its resemblance to more communal forms is of a different order altogether to 'orality':

before writing, oral folk were group-minded because no feasible alternative had presented itself. In our age of secondary orality, we are group-minded self-consciously and programmatically. The individual feels that he or she, as an individual, must be socially sensitive. Unlike members of a primary oral culture, who are turned outward because they have had little occasion to turn inward, we are turned outward because we have turned inward.¹⁶³

The 'oral tradition', as Parker interpreted it, was the model for management of communications media in 'the global village', and the effective creation of programmes.¹⁶⁴ Yet the notion that the modern media could be heir to an 'authentic' and disappeared orality is somewhat optimistic. Surely the character of orality is its shared and interactive nature, the teller situated in physical proximity to an audience. In such a situation, the tale, or language is always subject to scrutiny and amendment, entirely contingent in its 'nowness'. Recordings of interviews, tapes, LPs, are in themselves *fixed* texts whose status is that of the document - always the same. Furthermore, and even discounting the historically high degree of literacy in Britain since the nineteenth century, the claim that working-class culture is an oral one is misleading to say the least. To describe it as such - and Parker was not alone in this - seems to me to involve a particularly myopic romanticism and, quite

¹⁶² E.g., CPA 1/6/14, Charles Parker (Book proposal) 'Speak: That I May Know Thee', mss., 25 October 1976.

¹⁶³ Walter J. Ong, Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word, Methuen, London and New York, 1982, pp. 136-7.

arbitrarily, to divide the socio-cultural realm into a binary structure of oral and literate is one that does not historically obtain.

In previous chapters we have seen how the discovery of the working-classes, descriptions of their positive or negative qualities, has been a curiously recurrent and instructive event in British life. I would argue that consistent features in such descriptions, whether from 'within' or 'without', involve claims for the authenticity of what is exhibited, the authority of the 'explorer', and the implication, explicit or otherwise, that the working-class is an object that never knows itself. As Parker wrote of his work amongst the unemployed of Nottingham in the 1970s, 'Their education has not equipped them to make sense of their experience, and direct their youthful enthusiasm into effective channels'.¹⁶⁵ Clearly, what is known or knowable proves problematic too, always derived from the nature of the distance between observer and observed and the curious relationship that is entered into. As MacNeice observes 'Educated people in England, if they consort with members of the working classes, tend to think of them as 'characters' ... all the time the yokels are on the stage and you are in the stalls'.¹⁶⁶

According to Philip Donnellan, Parker's story is that 'of a genuinely honest man who, largely by accident found himself confronting *Reality*. All artists seek such a confrontation: in paint, in print, in film - but very few pursue it to the end with such unrelenting persistence or at such personal cost. He was indeed a man to

¹⁶⁴ See for instance, Charles Parker, 'The Challenge of the Global Village', *Listener*, 12 August 1976, Vol.96, No.2470, p. 170.

¹⁶⁵ Charles Parker, 'Jocular Superiority', *Listener*, Vol.100, No.2588, p. 714.

¹⁶⁶ Louis MacNeice, *The Strings are False* p. 140.

be remembered'.¹⁶⁷ The cost was met in the increasingly desperate vision of a cultural utopia and his over-extension in a dizzying array of projects that contributed to his premature death in 1980. When he died both The Times and Morning Star carried obituaries, celebrating his artistry and in the latter his status as a true champion of the working class.¹⁶⁸ Clearly, there are reasons for celebrating his life and his contribution to the democratic changes that have taken place over the last half-century which have accorded respect to each and every life. By the same degree, it is important to understand the limits of how the 'ordinary' was (and is) validated in relation to particular definitions and demands of 'authenticity', 'experience' and 'culture'.

¹⁶⁷ Phillip Donnellan, 'A Tribute to Charles Parker (1919-1980)', Programme of Commemoration, 11 December 1981(no page). My emphasis.

¹⁶⁸ Philip Cohen, 'Death of a Brilliant Producer', Morning Star, 12 December 1980, p. 3, also Alan Bishop and John Wrend, 'Ballad of the Working Class', Morning Star, 23 December 1980, p. 2.

Chapter Five.

Aggressive Romanticism: The Cultural Project of Centre 42.

'We will make stronger combinations out of common things'.¹

One of the effects of the radical movements of the late 1960s was the flowering of small-scale ventures in the creative arts. Most remarkable was the prodigious growth of alternative theatre companies. In London these included 'Portable Theatre', 'The Pip Simmons Group', 'Incubus', 'The Wharehouse/La Mama Company', 'Ed Berman's Inter-Action', 'Dogg's Troupe', 'Agitprop Street Players' (later 'Red Ladder') and 'Freehold'. Elsewhere, there was the 'Brighton Combination', 'Second City Theatre Company' in Birmingham, 'Bradford College of Art Group', Leeds' 'Welfare State', and in Edinburgh 'The Traverse Theatre Workshop'. In liberated and liberating spirit, these groups were often organised in ad hoc fashion, with both performance and venue improvised. Companies like these, and many others, were also supported by a network of new venues in the form of arts labs and community centres, as well as dedicated publications such as Time Out, which was established in 1968.²

Sue Braden has written that this wave of theatre was characterised by a common democratic ethos, a 'concern for the separation of art and artists from the rest of society, expressed by a growing concentration on new ways of putting art and

¹ Shelley, 'Prometheus Unbound', quoted in Charles Parker's production of 'The Maker and the Tool'.

² See for instance, Robert Hutchinson, Three Arts Centres: A Study of South Hall Park, The Gardener Centre, and Chapter, Arts Council of Great Britain, London, 1977; John Lane, Arts Centres: Every Town Should Have One, Paul Elek, London, 1978.

artists back into social contexts'.³ At heart was the extension of its social basis, to include the working class, the oppressed and the dispossessed. In order to make theatre enjoyable and *accessible*, all could be involved in its *creation*. It would be presented as neither mysterious nor the privilege of the élite few but the democratic right and the inherent capacity of the many.⁴

In this chapter I want to deal with an immediate precursor to this movement in the form of Centre 42. Originating in the theatrical world, this organisation was an amalgam of artists and trade unionists under the direction of the dramatist Arnold Wesker. Centre 42's 'Articles of Association' list its objects in banal fashion as the promotion and improvement of the Arts, and their advancement by education.⁵ In fact, it had a more spectacular and utopian intent, to 'change the whole cultural climate of this "dead behind the eyes" society'.⁶ This approach was characterised by Wesker as one of 'aggressive romanticism'.⁷

The attempt to achieve its ambitious goal began with the provision of several cultural festivals that Centre 42 programmes advertised as being 'for the people'. These took place in six English towns in 1961 and 1962. What resulted has been described as 'a story of inexperience, inefficiency, of deaf ears, of petty jealousies, temperamental actors and breakdowns in communications', yet in the same breath as

³ Su Braden, *Artists and People*, Routledge, London, 1978, p. 3.

⁴ Sandy Craig, 'Reflexes of the Future: The Beginnings of the Fringe' in Sandy Craig (ed.), *Dreams and Deconstructions: Alternative Theatre in Britain*, Amber Lane Press, Ambergate, 1980, pp. 9-10.

⁵ City of Birmingham Central Library, Charles Parker Archive (Hereafter CPA) 1/8/7/1. 'Societies and Organisations – on Membership and Activity'. Centre 42, *Articles of Association*, 4 September 1961. The main file is indicated by the first two numbers (e.g. 1/8). The main title of the file is given in each initial citation.

⁶ Arnold Wesker, 'Trade Unions and the Arts', *New Left Review*, No.5, September-October, 1960, p. 67.

⁷ Arnold Wesker, *Fears of Fragmentation*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1970, p. 118.

'a story of hope'.⁸ One commentator even suggested that it constituted 'a major development in contemporary British life ... to an entire generation of Englishmen and to the British working people as a whole'.⁹ Despite its grandiose vision and such estimable appreciation, Centre 42 has merited only cursory attention. Even in studies of Wesker's work it takes second place to the dramas, despite his committed decision to abandon writing for a period in order to run it. That this move might have been severely detrimental to his career makes its absence from his own recent autobiography all the more startling.¹⁰

One way of accounting for this neglect is the manner in which histories of alternative theatre have been undermined by what Sandy Craig describes as 'a myopic concentration' on 1968.¹¹ This has become the fount of a particular kind of cultural radicalism, and more than any other field, this theatre was defined by the political and theoretical contribution of the moment. A self-aggrandising radicalism and idealistic rectitude informed the work of many companies, writers, performers, critics and theorists. Proceeding with *a priori* concepts of what constituted 'proper' culture, its audience and aims, it was thus possible for an actor like Corin Redgrave to criticise playwright Trevor Griffiths for his theoretical deficiencies, for 'paddling

⁸ Kenneth Pearson, 'Wesker's Centre 42 Facing 'A Period of Adjustment'', Sunday Times, 27 January 1963, p. 4.

⁹ Quoted in Frank Coppieters, 'Arnold Wesker's Centre Fortytwo: A Cultural Revolution Betrayed', Theatre Quarterly, Vol. V. No. 18, June-August, 1975, p. 37.

¹⁰ Arnold Wesker, As Much as I Dare, Century, London, 1994. That the book deals only with the years up to 1959 is irrelevant. Wesker ignores chronological parameters and leaps forward to later events in order to evaluate his personal experience, artistic/public expression and to settle scores and right wrongs. The painfully candid insights into this life make one wonder at how painful the Centre 42 experience must have been to go virtually unmentioned.

¹¹ Craig, 'Reflexes of the Future', p. 18. E.g., Peter Ansorge's self-explanatory, Disrupting the Spectacle: Five Years of Experimental and Fringe Theatre in Britain, Pitman, London, 1975.

in the shadows of revolutionary practice'.¹² It is within this kind of framework that Centre 42 has been judged and found wanting.

By his own admission, 'an old-fashioned humanist', Wesker himself has been pilloried as a political lightweight, a 'reformist', a 'sort of confused and prevaricating liberal'.¹³ Likewise, Centre 42's attempt to bring culture to a new constituency has been discredited as 'mainstream cultural imperialism'.¹⁴ Assessed for its contribution to a positivist, progressive narrative, Wesker's 'crusade' and concept of society and culture 'rests on a completely false analysis'.¹⁵ John McGrath, his former colleague in Centre 42, complained of the lack of any 'Marxist - let alone Leninist - thought in his approach'.¹⁶ Yet it is salutary to remember that it is *theatre* (amongst other creative work) that is under examination here. As Craig suggests, there has been an over-estimation of alternative theatre's 'potentially revolutionary initiatives'.¹⁷ There is certainly an over-determination involved in continued attempts to 'construct a theory [of] alternative theatre's potential for efficacy, both at the micro-level of individual performance events, and at the macro-level of the movement as a whole'.¹⁸

¹² Corin Redgrave quoted by Griffiths in Catherine Itzin, Stages in the Revolution: Political, Theatre in Britain Since 1968, Methuen, London, 1980, p. 168. Categories and characteristics of 'Working Class Theatre', 'Political Theatre' and 'Revolutionary Theatre' are all set out in Roger Hudson, 'Towards a Definition of People's Theatre', Theatre Quarterly, Vol. 1, No. 4, October-December 1971, p. 100-1.

¹³ Arnold Wesker quoted in 'A Sense of What Should Follow', interview with Catherine Itzin, Glenda Leeming and Simon Trussler, Theatre Quarterly, Vol. VII, No. 28, Winter 1977-78, p. 20, and Itzin, Stages in the Revolution, p. 102.

¹⁴ Baz Kershaw, The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention, Routledge, London, 1992, p. 118.

¹⁵ John McGrath, 'Friends and Enemies', Black Dwarf, Vol. 14, No. 35, 12 June 1970, p. 15.

¹⁶ From unpublished correspondence between John McGrath and Arnold Wesker, June 1970, printed by permission in Itzin, Stages in the Revolution, p. 103. This exchange was prompted by McGrath's review of Wesker's play The Friends in the radical newspaper Black Dwarf, (*Ibid*).

¹⁷ Sandy Craig, 'Reflexes of the Future', p. 10.

¹⁸ Kershaw, The Politics of Performance, p. 16.

Inevitably, Wesker is central to the story of Centre 42, yet I want to counter Frank Coppieters' assertion that 'it has been mainly a one-man vision'.¹⁹ An exploration of the origins of that vision, its context, parameters, inconsistency, and the various positions within Centre 42 underwrite the original contribution of this focus. Stuart Laing, who provides a brief yet sympathetic account of its work, points out that in practice it offered a mixture of high and 'popular' culture at its festivals, although in avoiding 'commercial' forms, exactly how the 'popular' was understood was a key issue.²⁰ Alan Sinfield's description of its vague gestures towards the creativity of ordinary people ignores the currency of its ideas and how they were framed.²¹ In fact, much of what it produced accords with many of those projects already outlined that sought to explore and give expression to a valid working-class culture. In the wake of the preceding chapter, of particular interest is Charles Parker's role in the organisation and his production of 'The Maker and the Tool'. Here, Parker's archive allows some original insights into Centre 42's project as well as its reception and perception by its would-be working-class allies and audiences.²²

¹⁹ Coppieters, 'Arnold Wesker's Centre Fortytwo', p. 37.

²⁰ Stuart Laing, Representations of Working-Class Life: 1957-1964, Macmillan, Houndmills, 1986, p. 105.

²¹ As discussed on p. 9.

²² I am indebted to Beryl and Manny Ruehl, Clive Barker, Pam Bishop and Dr. David Watts of the University of Newcastle, Australia, who all gave me their time and conversation during the research for this chapter.

Arnold Wesker has been described as ‘a small, generous, affectionate young man, combative without rancour [who] rose from obscurity to denounce and sympathise, to proclaim and refresh’.²³ Initially finding fame in the late 1950s as the archetypal ‘Angry Young Man’, Wesker was one of a group of young playwrights who sought to widen the vista of British theatre in the wake of John Osborne’s Look Back In Anger (1956).²⁴ It can be overstated, but what was generally conveyed upon the stage at that time was ‘a picture of a settled, untroubled society’.²⁵ In 1954, critic Kenneth Tynan complained of the dominance in theatre of barrack-room farce, drawing-room comedy and murder melodrama. The last two genres were invariably set in a country house located in ‘Loamshire’, ‘a glibly codified fairy-tale world’ where ‘the inhabitants belong to a social class derived partly from romantic novels’.²⁶ More recently, Ian MacDonald has written of ‘genteel, class-segregated staidness’ of society at that time, conveyed more generally in ‘The braying upper-class voices on newsreels, the odour of unearned privilege in parliament and the courts, the tired nostalgia for the war’.²⁷ Osborne’s Jimmy Porter arrived to rail against this world only to complain that ‘there aren’t any good, brave causes left’ (Act 3, Scene 1).

For others, such obvious nihilism was a self-indulgent and certainly unfounded reaction to the post-war world. In her contribution to the polemical

²³ Peter Vansittart, In the Fifties, John Murray, London, 1995, p. 234.

²⁴ See: John Russell Taylor, Anger and After (revised edition), Eyre Methuen, London, 1978; Lawrence Hitchin, Drama in the Sixties: Form and Institution, Faber and Faber, London, 1966 and Stephen Lacey, The British Realist Theatre: The New Wave in its Context: 1956-1965, Routledge, London and New York, 1995.

²⁵ E. McFadyn, The British Theatre: A Personal View, National Book League, London, 1977, no page.

²⁶ Kenneth Tynan, A View of the English Stage: 1944-63, Davis-Poynter, London, 1975, p. 148.

²⁷ Ian MacDonald, Revolution in the Head: The Beatles’ Record and the Sixties, Pimlico, London,

collection Declaration (1957) Doris Lessing reflected upon the role of the artist and what commitment might mean when faced with such disillusionment. In Britain at least, alongside continuing social inequalities there was an attendant *cultural* battle to be fought. She wrote that 'I look forward to the working class being emancipated into readers and writers of serious literature ... when a hitherto inarticulate class is released into speech, it brings a fresh rush of vitality into literature'.²⁸

Born of Jewish immigrant parents, Wesker is a classic working-class autodidact. He held innumerable jobs before training as a filmmaker at the London School of Film Technique. He wrote an unpublished novel before his play writing drew the attention of director Lindsay Anderson - then of the Royal Court Theatre. More than any other of his contemporaries, Wesker was concerned with portraying the lineaments of working-class life. While Look Back in Anger placed an ironing board on stage (even if Osborne was quite conventional in placing a woman behind it) a piece like The Kitchen brought the rhythms of work and vernacular speech to it. Written in 1956, 'in between serving sweets at the Hungaria Restaurant', its ensemble cast of 29 actors represented what was involved 'behind the scenes' in such a place.²⁹ The trilogy of Chicken Soup With Barley (1958), Roots (1959) and I'm Talking About Jerusalem (1960), drew upon his own family history and dealt with the political promise of the war, the nature of the post-war settlement and its effect upon the working classes. On this basis Ronald Hayman has suggested that Wesker's plays seem to announce 'See how little I have to transcribe in order to give

1995, p. 7.

²⁸ Doris Lessing, 'The Small Personal Voice' in Tom Maschler (ed.), Declaration, MacKibbon and Kee, London, 1957, p. 22

²⁹ Ronald Hayman, Arnold Wesker (2nd edition), Heinemann, London, 1974, p. 2

you drama'.³⁰ Yet Wesker did more than merely *reflect* ordinary life, his work was based upon an extremely ambivalent relationship with it.

By his own estimation, a 'ruffian' formed by the privations of the East End, Wesker has expressed an intense allegiance to his characters and those that they represent, announcing that 'I am at one with these people'.³¹ However, he has also been guided by a pathological disdain for the limited cultural ambit of this world. He has said that: 'One of the things that I've inherited from my parents is a kind of intense fear of brutishness – of the *Lumpenproletariat* ... it's a fear inherited from the community of that brutish quality and the feeling that something needs to be done against it. Because it's dangerous'.³² It is uncertain whether this brutishness is a native quality, but for Wesker, it was certainly inculcated and accentuated by a preference for the vacuous cultural output attendant upon post-war affluence. He has said that it was this fear that linked his plays to the whole approach of Centre 42, directing his desire to rectify the situation and to change the tastes and preferences of working people in general.³³

Common to many of his early plays is a didacticism about the virtues of high culture, its appurtenances serving to temper 'brutality'. There is also an explicit reference to Robert Owen, William Morris and Robert Blatchford and the Labour tradition that locates the quality of Utopia in proper culture and its acquisition. It

³⁰ Ronald Hayman, British Theatre Since 1955: A Reassessment, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1979, p. 43.

³¹ Arnold Wesker, 'Notes to Actors and Producers', The Wesker Trilogy, Penguin Books, 1964, p. 7. Wesker's self-assessment is in Hayman, Arnold Wesker, p. 5.

³² Quoted in Hayman, Arnold Wesker, p. 4. It is interesting to compare this fear and repugnance, and Wesker's desire to do something about it, with Pamela Fox's description of 'shame' as a feature of characters in working-class writing. See Pamela Fox, Class Fictions: Shame and Resistance in the British Working-Class Novel, 1890-1945, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 1994.

³³ in Hayman, Arnold Wesker, p. 4.

offers a vision of what the Millennium might feel like, and is a measure of the limits of merely material gains. In Roots, for instance, Wesker tracks the growth of Beatie Bryant, lover of Ronnie Khan, and the manner in which her relationship with her family is transformed under his tutelage:

[BEATIE *puts on record of Bizet's L'Arlésienne Suite.*] Now listen. This is a simple piece of music, it's not highbrow but it's full of living. And that's what he say socialism is. "Christ," he say. "Socialism isn't talking all the time, it's living, it's singing, it's dancing, it's being interested in what go on around you, it's being concerned about people and the world" (Act 2, Scene 2).³⁴

Likewise with an 'authentic' form like folk song (*especially* folk song): Wesker, via Beattie, outlines how its qualities are those that cannot be found in comicbooks, or sentimental pop lyrics like *'I'll wait for you in the heaven's blue'*. (Act 2, Scene 1).

The presence of these ideas, sketched in plays that were critically well-received, if not great commercial successes, suggests something of their currency.³⁵ Wesker could have expected most of his audience to be familiar with the issues raised and largely sympathetic to such cultural arguments. It certainly meant a lot to one constituency, for whom Roots brought 'life' and 'truth' to the London stage, that

³⁴ Ronald Khan = Arnold Wesker.

³⁵ Chicken Soup With Barley ran for one week at the Belgrade, Coventry and one at the Royal Court in 1958. In 1959, Roots ran for about two months in Coventry and London together and The Kitchen ran for two *nights* at the Royal Court. Chips With Everything, 'Wesker's only commercially successful play' ran for a year (See <http://www.arnoldwesker.com/Ichron60.htm>, 11 April 2001). These plays did reach a wider audience thanks, in part, to Penguin Books whose policy was 'to publish the most stimulating plays by younger dramatists in England to-day, and thus to give them wider publicity amongst people who have not had the opportunity to see them performed'. 'Penguin Young Dramatists' (advertisement), New Left Review, No.1, January-February 1960, p. 37.

it 'tells us the truth about ourselves in the New Left'.³⁶ Here, a figure like Beattie was the representative Trade Unionist or Labour voter in need of radicalising, 'for she might become one of the salt of the earth, one of the transformatory minority, one of the leaven that will lift the loaf'.³⁷ People like this were in need of education and cultivation in order that they might resist the superficial yet disarming distractions of 'mass culture' that inhibited maturity and the fulfilment of the Socialist project. And, unlike the nihilistic Jimmy Porter, Wesker was one who acted upon this, seeking to take his message to 'the people that matter'.

Beginning with an essay in the theatre magazine Encore in November 1958, he launched a sustained polemic about the cultural state of the nation. It was not enough to write *about* working-class life and to be an artist, one had to reach 'the bus driver, the housewife, the miner and the Teddy Boy'.³⁸ What was at issue was an absence in such lives. Echoing Blatchford's Merrie England (1894), he conjured up an image of an everyman, a 'Mr Smith', whose life is one of emptiness - at work, in the home and at play. Practical considerations aside, this is a figure who has not been able to properly fulfil himself: 'At each crisis in his life, somehow, he had found he was not equipped to handle it - and not only that, he had never understood the nature of that crisis. It was not simply that no one had given him the tools for living, but no one had told him he needed any tools beyond a job that would earn

³⁶ Michale Kaye, 'The New Drama', New Left Review, No.5, September-October 1960, p. 65. For him, Beattie's final speech was 'A ULR Editorial to end all ULR Editorials', p. 66. Wesker was something of a favourite in this journal. Extracts of The Kitchen appeared in New Left Review, No.1, pp. 32-37.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Arnold Wesker, 'Let Battle Commence' (originally in Encore, Vol.V, No.4, 1958), reprinted in Charles Marowitz, Tom Milne and Owen Hale (eds), The Encore Reader: A Chronicle of the New Drama, Methuen, London, 1970, p. 96. For an incomplete record of these speeches see: Fears of Fragmentation.

him money to fulfil responsibilities'.³⁹ Few of those who went to the theatre every night, or patronised art galleries or classical concerts, were coalminers, dockers, farm labourers, steelmen, bricklayers or railwaymen. Yet it was these figures whose lives were being stultified by the 'unbroken' continuation of age-old, sub-standard, socio-cultural habits, and by the modern habit of watching TV. While these habits might have been determined by class differences and social opportunities in the past, for Wesker this was no longer an excuse. Instead, 'It is now possible - because of the economic advantages gained by the unions and the socialist parties - for everyone to read books from the libraries, listen to concerts on the radio, visit the theatres and in general take part in the cultural life of the community'.⁴⁰

Wesker's opening cry in Encore, to 'Let Battle Commence', obscures the manner in which his argument was an engagement with existing debates as well as admittedly vague and non-committal political promises about culture, the arts and leisure. As touched upon in Chapter One, while these areas were not explicit concerns in pre-war British party politics, this area became a notable adjunct to the post-war settlement and attendant egalitarian ethos.⁴¹ The Labour Party expressed its interest in culture as part of its desire for 'citizens capable of thinking for themselves'.⁴² It promised increased provision of concert halls, civic centres and modern libraries, 'to assure to our people full access to the great heritage of culture

³⁹ Wesker, 'Let Battle Commence', p. 98.

⁴⁰ Arnold Wesker, 'The Modern Playwright, or Oh, Mother Is It Worth It?' (1960), a speech printed up as a special edition of Gemini, the Oxford Students Union magazine, reprinted in Fears of Fragmentation, Jonathan Cape, London, 1970, p. 16.

⁴¹ Even the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) enshrined the notion, that 'Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community and to enjoy the arts', quoted in Roy Shaw, The Arts and the People, Jonathan Cape, 1987, London, pp. 118-9.

⁴² 'Let Us Face the Future' (1945) in Iain Dale (ed.), Labour Party General Election Manifestos, 1900-1997, Routledge, London, 2000, p. 58.

in this nation'.⁴³ Yet at issue too were reservations about the effects of a burgeoning consumer society. Having overseen this great liberation, for Conservatives too 'the Use of Leisure' was something that needed to be 'more purposeful and creative, especially for the young'.⁴⁴ The concern with 'the masses' and 'mass society' was thus sounded at the highest level and was shared by those of the Left and Right alike. In a House of Lords debate on the 'Problems and Opportunities of Leisure' in 1960, the Earl of Arran voiced his fears about the fact that 'Now we are faced with the prospect of tens of millions of leisured persons with few responsibilities and with incomplete education, What are they going to do with their spare time? ... Judging by present social habits one envisages a great sea of blank, gaping faces stretching out before the innumerable television screens from midday to midnight, with short pauses for the absorption of tinned foods recommended on the advertising programmes'.⁴⁵

With a desire to reach a new audience and to put his ideas into practice, Wesker addressed their representatives, lecturing meetings of trade unionists and MPs.⁴⁶ In 1960 he had two of his lectures forwarded to the general secretary of every British trade union.⁴⁷ These were sent out with an endorsement from Bill

⁴³ The Labour Party, 'Let Us Face the Future', p. 58.

⁴⁴ 'The Next Five Years' (1959) in Iain Dale (ed.), Conservative Party General Election Manifestos, 1900-1997, Routledge, London 2000, p. 136.

⁴⁵ Earl of Arran, 2 March 1960, Parliamentary Debates, Fifth Series, House of Lords Report, Vol. 221, HMSO, London, 1960, col. 656. Arran also suggested here that the unions take a more active interest in the provision of the arts.

⁴⁶ E.g., A two week tour of Scottish Trades Councils, see 'Two Snarling Heads' reprinted in Fears of Fragmentation. Wesker addressed the Parliamentary Labour Party's Arts and Amenities Group in December 1960 see: University of Warwick, Modern Records Centre (Hereafter MRC), 'TUC: Educational Activities, Cultural Amenities'. MSS 292B/812.1/1. Letter, Dr. Barnett Stross MP, to Vic Feather (Assistant General Secretary, TUC). Wesker also addressed a number of union summer schools etc., see Gerry Cohen, 'A Writer Speaks to the Workers', Daily Worker, 30 September 1960, p. 2.

⁴⁷ Wesker, 'The Modern Playwright, or Oh, Mother Is It Worth It?' and 'Labour and the Arts: II or

Holdsworth of the Association of Engineering and Shipbuilding Draughtsmen. Wesker set out the reasons why they should address the cultural situation and how to go about it. The premise of his argument was borrowed from William Morris, that worker and artist had much in common.⁴⁸ This was a relationship in need of avowal and renewal. In the manner that the Labour movement voiced the political concerns of ordinary people, culture had a part of play too. It offered a way of allowing the people to find their own voice, enriching the Labour movement's struggle, and even national prestige. More than this, it offered a means of protecting the working classes from the attentions of 'big business'. Capitalism was always in the wings, waiting to rape, pillage and distort: 'The community for which the Trade Unions purport to stand will continue to be at the mercy of the cultural "cheap jacks" and easy entertainment boys'.⁴⁹

The need for cultural expression went hand in hand with access to reputable models of what could be achieved. Wesker suggested that half-a-dozen unions should be allocated responsibility for building new theatres in 'needy industrial centres'. Suitable personnel could be found in Joan Littlewood's 'Theatre Workshop', or amongst the young-bloods of the Royal Court Theatre. The film unit of the ACTT (Association of Cinematograph, Television and Allied Technicians) could do with help expanding its experimental programme, perhaps underwriting the 'Free Cinema' movement which would provide exciting films from socially conscious directors. Likewise, he proposed that 'a venture be sponsored to reclaim

What, Then is to be Done?', printed as a special edition of Gemini, Oxford Students Union Magazine, May 1960.

⁴⁸ In Wesker, 'Labour and the Arts: II', p. 5.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 6.

both the traditional and newly developed folk songs, work songs and ballads that will surely be forgotten in the membership of the labour movement unless something is done'.⁵⁰ Other mooted projects included the sponsoring of artists, exhibitions and orchestras. There could be bursaries for talented but deprived kids as well as a publishing house, 'to print the work of writers who otherwise would have to rely on the fashionable whims and economic dictates of commercial publishing'.⁵¹

It was in fact the ACTT that took up Wesker's suggestion to at least initiate an inquiry into the feasibility of his ideas. This was placed on the agenda of the 1960 Trades Union Congress and put to the attendant delegates:

Our Movement was created to ensure that the people - all the people - have a chance to enjoy the good things of life, not only in terms of food and homes, but also in terms of the beauty and riches of life in all its forms ... Too much that is good in our heritage is cheapened, is distorted, and vulgarised by the purveyors of mass entertainment ... We believe that Congress will be with us when we say we reject the idea that culture should be the preserve of an enlightened intelligentsia, and that any old rubbish is good enough for the masses.⁵²

Resolution 42 was passed on 8 September 1960, recognising 'the importance of arts in the life of the community' and that the trade union movement 'participated to only a small extent' in their promotion.⁵³ Wesker had advised that any inquiry resulating from Resolution 42 should be an independent one, and that any committee

⁵⁰ Wesker, 'Labour and the Arts: II', p. 3.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁵² Ralph Bond, quoted in 'Promotion and Encouragement of the Arts', Report of the Proceedings at the 92nd Annual Trades Union Congress, September 5-9 1960, Co-operative Print Society Ltd,

should include artists, sociologists and teachers.⁵⁴ Instead, the TUC's Education Committee conducted it. A report was delivered to Congress in 1961, acknowledged and promptly shelved.⁵⁵

Theatre historian, critic and theorist Baz Kershaw has suggested that Wesker's mission was responsible for a 'serious historical disjunction', Centre 42's ultimate failure responsible for justifying the continued indifference towards cultural issues on the part of the union movement.⁵⁶ This is based on an overestimation of its receptivity to Wesker's ideas, despite their apparent attractions. For instance, in his classic account of British Trade Unionism, Henry Pelling documented some of the problems facing the TUC in the late 1950s. It had lost much of its popular repute and was perceived to be unable to adapt to a changing world in which old style allegiances were deemed redundant. Membership *had* increased yet the proportion of the workforce that was unionised had declined, partly due to the increase in new white-collar jobs. TUC General Secretary George Woodcock, 'a new type of trade-union leader', was thus faced with a need to reform union bureaucracy and modernise its image.⁵⁷

Wesker's speeches and essays advertised the glamour and attractiveness of cultural endeavours, of how they might enhance the spirit and repute of the unions. Yet Woodcock was sceptical about the whole idea of Resolution 42 and the General

London, 1960, pp. 435-6.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 506.

⁵⁴ MRC. MSS 292B/812.1/1. Letter, October 6 1960, George Woodcock to Arnold Wesker. Woodcock acknowledged Wesker's advice but revealed that Resolution 42 had been referred to the TUC Education Committee.

⁵⁵ As discussed in Report of the Proceedings at the 93rd Annual Trades Union Congress, September 4-8 1961, Co-operative Print Society Ltd, London, 1961, pp. 1961, pp. 453-4.

⁵⁶ Kershaw, The Politics of Performance, p. 105.

⁵⁷ Henry Pelling, A History of British Trade Unionism, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1992 (first

Council had advised against its adoption.⁵⁸ Given the immediate problems facing the unions, he cannot have been too attentive to a glut of letters from artists and organisations prompted by the Resolution and asking for aid.⁵⁹ In fact, the TUC's resulting investigation seems to have been based upon a foregone conclusion, that 'It is on the whole unlikely that our consideration of the resolution passed by the Congress will tend to a radical change in our approach to this subject'.⁶⁰ Ultimately, the Education Committee was of the opinion that 'Union members are the same as all other members of the community and the "problem" of awareness, participation and standards is a matter for all and should be addressed therefore by "the appropriate public authorities"'.⁶¹ By the same degree, Resolution 42 and its supporters underestimated the contribution of members to the nation's cultural life. The final report offered a rebuff to Wesker's patronising comments, protesting that 'the extent of the present participation by workers in cultural activities is frequently underestimated'.⁶² It pointed to the fact that people *did* pursue or practice music, painting, films, drama and so on. Likewise provision for these activities or interests came from organisations like the WEA, LEAs and Co-Ops. Thus it was concluded

published 1963), pp. 243-4.

⁵⁸ E.g., comments from W.B. Beard of the General Council and Ralph Bond's reply reported in Report of the Proceedings at the 92nd Annual Trades Union Congress, pp. 437-8. Also, MRC, MSS 292B/812.1/1. Letter, 28 September 1960, Arnold Wesker to George Woodcock.

⁵⁹ See: MRC, MSS 292B/812.1/1. Letter (no date) Various signatories in support of Resolution 42 to George Woodcock. Other letters included in this file come from the BFI, Asian Music Circle, Rotherham Trades Council, The Arts Workers Guild etc. See also: Victor Passmore, J.B. Priestley, Angus Wilson and Feliks Topolski, 'Vision, Vision! Mr Woodcock!', New Statesman, Vol. LX, No.1138, 3 September 1960, pp. 298-302.

⁶⁰ MRC, MSS 292B/812.1/1. Letter, 12 December 1960. D. Winnard (TUC Education Secretary), to Arthur Llewellyn Smith (Honorary Secretary, the Arts Workers Guild).

⁶¹ MRC, MSS 292B/812.1/1. 'Minutes of Education Committee, 8 November 1960. Item 25. Promotion and Encouragement of the Arts'.

⁶² Quoted in Arnold Wesker, 'Art - Therapy of Experience?', Views, No. 4, Spring 1964, p. 46. The full 7000 word Report is printed in Report of the Proceedings at the 93rd Annual Trades Union Congress, pp. 191-304.

that this activity 'strongly suggests the existence of a widely based popular culture considerably richer than is often assumed by critics of the present situation'.

In the end, any argument about the centrality of 'culture' – self-evident to Wesker or critics like Kershaw – ignores its lack of importance to the majority. Indeed, while it may have been a matter for the Lords, debates about the 'quality' of life when measured in this way were inconsequential to many who might have been surprised to find that their lives were lived in crisis. Thus, the logic of the TUC's ambivalence was best summed by Bill Carron, President of the AEU. He remarked that: 'I can't see that there is any massive demand for the things Centre 42 wants. It's a magnificent concept but these people are evangelists and evangelists need cold, hard cash. Believe me, if eight million trade unionists *really* wanted something that wasn't there, they'd get it quickly enough'.⁶³

Without substantial support from the representatives of the union movement, Wesker drew upon other resources and networks in order to demonstrate the validity of his ideas and how they could be achieved. In July 1958, he had written to Charles Parker that 'There are people who are vigorous and enthusiastic about the values in life and who have a talent - but we are scattered. Lets (sic) hope we can all get together one day and be a real cultural force in England'.⁶⁴ Around Christmas 1961, a small group of creative people who shared these values began to come together in the theatrical world, 'discussing dissatisfaction with the ways and mean of working for the commercial set-up and the isolation of actors, painters, musicians and other

⁶³ Quoted in Ruth Hall, 'Wesker: What the Workers Want?', Topic, 15 September 1962, Vol. 2, No.48, p. 13.

⁶⁴ CPA 2/90/23. 'Progammes and Projects: Centre 42: Peformance'. Letter, 25 July 1958, Arnold Wesker to Charles Parker.

artists from the public they wish to contact'.⁶⁵ They included Wesker, Bernard Kops, Sean Connery, Mordecai Richler, Shelagh Delaney, Sean Kenny, Clive Exton and Doris Lessing. Lessing recalls that even after the controversial, if not always successful, inroads of John Osborne and indeed Wesker, the theatre was hopelessly conservative. It was an exclusive world surrounded by ritual and the mystique of the artistic genius. Seeking to express their democratic commitment this group was hatching a 'wildly idealistic plan' to loosen it up.⁶⁶ Putative ideas included the acquisition of a warehouse in Covent Garden and the establishment of a free space in order to explore new modes of expression, put on ignored foreign plays, to initiate workshops etc. It was to be community-centered, if not a community centre as such, intended as 'a living reproach to commercial theatre'.⁶⁷ The problem was how such individuals could *actually* commit themselves when they had their own careers to pursue. It was Wesker who volunteered himself: 'Arnold sat unsmiling and then announced, "There is only one person who can run this thing, and I am the person."' Ted Allen joked that Stalin had spoken. And that was the end ... as we envisaged it. Off went Arnold to start Centre 42'.⁶⁸

A committee was formed in early 1961 comprising Clive Exton, Ted Kotcheff, Doris Lessing, Arnold Wesker and Clive Barker. Lately of Theatre Workshop, Barker produced a policy statement that attempted to crystallise a common ethos based upon the identity of those involved as artists who shared

⁶⁵ CPA 2/90/22. Letter, 9 July 1961, Clive Barker to Charles Parker.

⁶⁶ Doris Lessing, Walking in the Shade: Volume Two of My Autobiography 1949-1962, Harper Collins, London, 1997, p. 330. Also, CPA 1/8/7/1. 'Centre 42: Report of First Committee Meeting', 15 February 1961.

⁶⁷ Lessing, Walking in the Shade, p. 331.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 332.

socialist values.⁶⁹ These values included a belief in community, social responsibility and an anti-commercial approach towards the theatre and the arts. Barker's own outlook, later conveyed in Festival Programmes, was based upon a belief 'that most of the theatre and the other arts in this country is corrupt in content and presentation, trivial and unentertaining and even less stimulating. He deplores the concentration of Arts in London to the neglect and deprivation of the rest of the country and welcomes almost any move to start projects that will give communities their own theatres and encourage efforts on the part of the people to create their own art'.⁷⁰

The initial aim of Centre 42 activity was to generate publicity and elicit funds in order to underwrite any future projects. It did receive considerable newspaper coverage from its inception and could claim an impressive roster of sympathisers and benefactors, even if most were not figures readily associated with socialism. These included Sir Laurence Olivier, Tony Richardson, CP Snow, George Devine, Michael Balcon, impresario Sidney Bernstein, Hugh Casson, Peter Hall, Jack Hawkins, Vivien Leigh, Joan Littlewood, Bernard Miles, Henry Moore, Robert Morley, John Osborne, Michael Redgrave, Peter Sellers, Sybil Thorndike, Barbara Hepworth, Angus Wilson, Richard Attenborough and Benjamin Britten. Centre 42's own letterhead listed a number of 'Friends' who had donated money and goodwill. They included 'predictable propagandists' such as Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams, J.B. Priestley and Kenneth Tynan.⁷¹ Others who lent support included Alan Sillitoe, John Berger, Robert Bolt, Laurence Olivier, Joan Plowright, Terence

⁶⁹ CPA1/8/7/1. "Report: Recommendations on Centre 42 Policy", dated 26 August 1961, p. 1 ff. Attached to Letter, 30 August 1961, Clive Barker to all Centre 42 members. Also CPA 1/8/7/1. Centre 42: First Report of First Committee Meeting 15 February 1961, p. 1.

Rattigan and Vanessa Redgrave. Noel Coward gave money and. Stanley Baker, one of the highest paid British actors of the day, pledged a month's wages to the cause.

Centre 42's banal name derived from the TUC resolution of course, and it was a way of underlining the ambition of the project, maintaining some kind of faith with the unions. In the same manner, a council of management included Ralph Bond of the ACTT, the sceptical Bill Carron, Frank Cousins of the TGWU, Ted Hill of the Boilermakers Union as well as Labour MP Jennie Lee. Few of them attended meetings, and if at all it was on rare occasions. Yet, while they might have been uncommitted and the upper echelons of the TUC might have been sceptical of Wesker's ideas, others were very responsive and enthusiastic. Many within the labour movement recognised that Wesker was in fact attempting to revivify an honourable tradition. George Jeger, Chair of the Parliamentary Group of the TGWU, recalled that between the wars, artists, musicians, actors and writers 'were to be found automatically in the Socialist ranks'.⁷⁰ Union and Socialist journals had been informative and sympathetic towards the arts, 'they stimulated interest in the creative arts as being part of the better life for which we were striving ... "Man does not live by bread alone" was their constant cry. Consequently our meetings were often enlivened by songs, dramatic sketches, music, poetry and choirs. Love of the artistic attracted as many people to our support as the demand for Social Justice among the "intellectuals" of those days'. Woodcock was lobbied by Clive Jenkins, General Secretary of the Association of Supervisory Staffs Executives and Technicians, as

⁷⁰ CPA 2/90/15. 'Biographical Sketch of Clive Barker', Programme: Wellingborough Trades Union Festival. November 1st to 4th 1961, p. 3.

⁷¹ Hall, 'Wesker: What the Workers Want?', p. 14.

several branches of his union had expressed interest in Resolution 42.⁷³ Likewise, G.H. Doughty of the Association of Engineering and Shipbuilding Draughtsmen suggested that there was 'a fair measure of interest' amongst active members.⁷⁴ He recalled how the AESD AGM of 1958 involved a concert of folk music and how 'Nearly all the songs in the concert were associated with trade unionism or with man's labour'. Younger members in particular were active in the folk scene, groups that unions *needed* to attract.

Centre 42 was galvanised into action by Kit Mynard, the Secretary of Wellingborough Trades Council. In early 1961 she invited it to become involved in that year's Council festival in order to make it a more prestigious *cultural* event. She commented that, 'As trade unionists we are concerned with more than collecting union dues, we are concerned with a whole way of life'.⁷⁵ The challenge was enthusiastically accepted, with Wellingborough providing a provincial testing ground for the collective skills and vision of those involved. The result of this event and the publicity surrounding it were further invitations from Trades Councils in Leicester, Nottingham, Birmingham, Bristol, Hayes in Middlesex (as well as Wellingborough, again) to manage their festivals in 1962.

For Wesker, the opportunity provided by the festivals was that the value of culture could be 'demonstrated and proved *relevant*' to a working-class constituency.⁷⁶ For him, what was important was the maintenance of high standards,

⁷² George Jeger, 'Wanted! A Trade Union Approach to the Arts!', TGWU Record, December 1960, p. 36.

⁷³ MRC, MSS 292B/812.1/1. Letter, 19 December 1960, Clive Jenkins to George Woodcock.

⁷⁴ MRC, MSS 292B/812.1/1. Letter, 20 December 1960, G.H. Doughty to George Woodcock.

⁷⁵ Kit Mynard, 'Why Should a Trades Council Present Such a Festival?', Reynolds News, 29 October 1961, p. 8.

⁷⁶ Wesker, 'Trade Unions and the Arts', p. 67.

that festivals 'must not be esoteric little gatherings on the one hand or weak, amateurish efforts on the other; they must be robust, exciting and as professional as possible'.⁷⁷ The question was what *kind* of culture would Centre 42 endorse and what did it mean 'to awaken people to the joys of living, by participation'?⁷⁸ There was some confusion, often wilful, about this issue and the prospect of attracting the intended audience. One surprising source of criticism was Sir William Emrys Williams. Lately Secretary General of the Arts Council of Great Britain and of course, a founder of its precursor, the wartime Council for the Encouragement of the Music and the Arts (C.E.M.A.), Williams had once been a populist, the originator of the pre-war 'Art For the People' exhibits that had continued as a successful feature of C.E.M.A. activities. He doubted Centre 42's whole ethos, that 'The bad too easily drives out the good and, although our arts festivals now include a bait for Caliban, I wonder if he swallows the rest'.⁷⁹ Another commentator suggested of the project that 'It is basically an attempt to interest the masses (a word frowned on by Centre 42, but implicit in the whole idea of the venture) in artistic values that have so far been largely appreciated by the middle and upper classes. The fact that working-class plays and novels are now enjoying a vogue - except among the working classes - further complicates the ambiguous atmosphere of Centre 42'.⁸⁰ One Trades Council journal unreflexively added to this ambiguity, approvingly noting that Centre 42

⁷⁷ Wesker, 'Trade Unions and the Arts', p. 67.

⁷⁸ Roger Silver, 'Preview: Centre 42's Trade Union Festival', *Guardian*, 8 September 1962, p. 5.

⁷⁹ William Emrys Williams, 'How Many Highbrows?', *The Sunday Telegraph*, 27 May 1962, p. 14.

⁸⁰ Hall, 'Wesker: What the Workers Want?', p. 14.

implied 'the complete change in the cultural habits of the nation. Art is not being brought to the people and people are not demanding it themselves'.⁸¹

In Centre 42's early policy statement Clive Barker wrote of avoiding 'the old familiar swamps of taking-culture-to-the-masses and socialist-propaganda-didactic-art'.⁸² Yet on this score it was patronisingly didactic, clearly *against* the kind of cultural pursuits that the working class seemed to be satisfied with already and not 'out to reach a catch-penny public'.⁸³ As Wesker opined, 'people aren't really happy ... They're bored and they know it'.⁸⁴ Centre 42 programmes and pronouncements resonated with Leavisite and Hoggartian rhetoric, that: 'We are concerned that people are so badly equipped to fully utilise their leisure. The Bingo halls full, the theatres empty, we see the standards of entertainment and culture being debased'.⁸⁵ However, there was an accompanying sense of anxiety about such assumptions and the rationale of the whole project. The introduction to one exhibit at Wellingborough asked 'Why introduce works of art in a trades council exhibition?' The answer was 'Because most of us are visually blind and the first steps towards the enjoyment of art is the awareness of the world around us'. In order to stimulate such awareness, material selected aimed to connect with people's lives. As it was a truism that contemporary exhibitions were seldom attended by 'the people', then artworks were taken to their preferred haunts - i.e. pubs: 'thus available for all to look at and,

⁸¹ Anon, 'The New Look Centre 42 and Trades Councils to Stage Festivals', The Journal, April 1962, p. 11.

⁸² CPA 1/8/7/1. Barker, 'Recommendations on Centre 42 Policy', p. 3.

⁸³ CPA 2/90/22. 'Working Notes for Organization of 1962 Trades Council Festivals: First Draft for the Attention of Artistic Heads and Centre 42 Personnel', p. 1.

⁸⁴ Quoted in Hall, 'Wesker: What the Workers Want?', p. 15.

⁸⁵ 'Trades Unions and the Festival', Fortytwo: For the People of Nottingham. Nottingham Trades Council Presents Festival One A Week of Music, Theatre, Dance, Paintings and Exhibitions, September 23rd-29th 1962, (Centre 42 Programme), p. 4.

through participation, awareness and familiarity it is hoped that art will become again a necessary part of the working man's daily life'.⁸⁶ Amongst the material displayed were abstracts of the interior of a panel shop and 'Men on Scaffolding', and artists of note whose work was exhibited included L.S.Lowry, Barbara Hepworth and Carel Weight.

One model for Centre 42 that Wesker had in mind was the contemporary work of the French director, actor and playwright Roger Planchon. A working-class autodidact too, Planchon formulated his own complex Marxist style and approach to performance. In 1957, at the age of 26, he took over a large municipal theatre in Lyons which was located in the working-class suburb of Villeurbanne where he proceeded to make canonical works available to the locals. Michael Kustow, one of Centre 42's young operatives, had even spent some time working there.⁸⁷ In the vein of Planchon's project, organisations like Stephen Joseph's 'Theatre in the Round' company were invited to contribute to Centre 42 festivals. Its existing mission was to take theatre to deprived locales, where 'a large proportion of our audiences have been people who are coming to the theatre for the first time'.⁸⁸ The National Youth Theatre provided a production of 'Hamlet', fatuously subtitled 'Shakespeare's Jimmy Porter'. It was suggested that: 'young people who have not seen it before may discover in Hamlet's disgust with society a reflection of their own youthful

⁸⁶ Programme: Wellingborough Trade Union Festival November 1-4, 1961, p. 12. Art was also valuable because 'individual expression can counteract the mundanity of mass-production' Henry Anderson et al, 'Letter: Trades Unions and Culture', New Statesman, Vol. LX, No. 1539, 10 September 1960, p. 339.

⁸⁷ See Arnold Wesker, 'Roger Planchon's Theatre', New Statesman, Vol. LX, No. 1538, 3 September 1960, pp. 302-3 and Michael Kustow, 'A Theatre for Our Time', New Left Review, No.12, November-December 1961, pp. 45-54.

⁸⁸ CPA 1/8/7/2. 'Programme: Studio Theatre Company, "Theatre in the Round", Winter 1960-1' (Director Stephen Joseph, Manager Joan Macalpine). Alan Ayckborn began his career here.

bewilderment ... as real for the young man growing up in the Midlands as they were to the young Prince in Elsinore'.

Negative evaluations of Centre 42 have been based around what is described as the attempt to 'import' high culture to working-class communities. Yet this ignores the manner in which its contributors attempted to work with concepts of working-class culture, but also the ambiguous status of the whole idea. While the late Fifties and early Sixties might have been marked by the prodigious success of a range of work dealing with working-class life, from Wesker to Alan Sillitoe, Shelagh Delaney and so on, in literature, theatre, film and television, there was no 'movement' behind it. There was certainly no theoretical imperative behind the corpus. There was in fact a contemporary antagonism about prescriptive notions of working-class 'art' based upon the dismal reputation accrued by work produced in the 1930s and its association with discredited communist and totalitarian ideas.⁸⁹ In its manifesto statements for instance, The Labour Party had insisted that any cultural policy must avoid 'interfering in any way with the free expression of the artist'.⁹⁰ In a discussion of Resolution 42 the TUC's education committee was of the opinion that any approach to the subject was informed by 'the need to avoid any suggestion of support for the concept of a specifically "workers"(sic) culture, based upon ideological considerations'.⁹¹ Likewise, an anti-ideological approach has been identified behind its instructions to 'regional education officers not to have classes

⁸⁹ For a recent reflection, see: Lessing, Walking in the Shade, p. 331. The apostasy of communist sympathisers of the 1930s was announced in Arthur Koestler's The God that Failed (1950).

⁹⁰ 'Let Us Win Through Together' (1950), in Dale (ed.), Labour Party General Election Manifestos, 1900-1997, p. 71.

⁹¹ MRC. MSS 292B/812.1/1. Letter, 18 November 1960, D. Winnard to Dame Edith Evans. Winnard expressed agreement with the point that the beliefs and principles of Trade Unions 'in no case' must be the first consideration in the promotion and encouragement of the arts.

on such subjects as public speaking or the history of the British working class'.⁹² A former member of the Young Communist League, Wesker had some poems rejected from its magazine 'Challenge' for displaying a lack of political commitment to the proletariat.⁹³ In his essays and speeches he denied that his ideas had any connection with concepts of cultural planning or ideological directives behind such approaches. The virtue of '*life*' and '*living*' provided by culture was inimical to the Socialist Realism of the Eastern Bloc: 'tractor novels', so-called, were 'not an inevitability'.⁹⁴

In the first flush of enthusiasm the original Centre 42 Committee had advised against the imposition of a particular style of writing, acting or directing 'though it seems probable that these things would emerge'.⁹⁵ Its post-festival Annual Report sought to correct the 'misconception' that it sought to propagate proletarian art:

It is assumed, as justification by many who applaud us and as fault by those who attack, that we are engaged in discovering and presenting a special kind of art known as working-class art for a special kind of human being, known as the proletariat. The reason why our friends make this assumption is understandable; it arises from a desperate need to believe that, after generations of art being alienated by class prerogative, there will be a point of contact they can comprehend and not find embarrassing.⁹⁶

⁹² Andrew Boyd, Tribune, 29 June 1979, quoted in Ken Worpole, 'A Ghostly Pavement: the Political Implications of Local Working-Class History' in Raphael Samuel (ed.), People's History and Socialist Theory, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1981, p. 23. In this period the National Council of Labour Colleges were dissolved and entered into the general apparatus of the TUC. A central plank in the provision of knowledge about Marxism within the labour movement was undermined from the very core.

⁹³ See Wesker, As Much as I Dare, pp. 473-4.

⁹⁴ Wesker, 'Oh, Mother is it Worth It?', p. 18.

⁹⁵ CPA 1/8/7/1. 'Centre 42: Report of First Committee Meeting', 15 February 1961, p. 2.

⁹⁶ Centre 42 Limited, Centre 42: Annual Report 1961-1962, London, 1963, p. 8.

Nonetheless, some idea of working-class culture *was* at work within Centre 42. Without theoretical foundations, it might best be explained as empirical in approach. Working-class culture was simply about the exploration of working-class life, experience and concerns and the cultivation of identifiably working-class artists. After his first successes, Wesker had taken issue with one critic's comment that there had been enough 'working-class plays'.⁹⁷ He protested that playwrights like Shelagh Delaney, Bernard Kops, Brendan Behan and himself had a right to be artists. He argued that, 'I saw my characters within the compass of a personal vision. I have a personal vision you know, and I will not be tolerated as a passing phase'.⁹⁸ In retrospect, he claimed that Centre 42 was also an attempt to consolidate and give a continuing outlet to those who had begun to articulate a concern with working-class life, 'whom I instinctively felt would be dismissed in a very short time because of the fashion-conscious rhythms of the cultural world ... when they suddenly got tired of what became known as the Kitchen Sink writers'.⁹⁹ Yet many ideas and plans in this vein fell by the wayside. Peter Harcourt and Alan Lovell of the BFI tried to arrange a film programme headlined by The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner (1962), which it was hoped would premier at the festivals. New plays were to be commissioned from Christopher Logue, Ann Jellicoe, Bernard Kops and John Arden.¹⁰⁰ A drama competition was aimed at both ordinary people

⁹⁷ T.C. Worsley, 'The Sweet Smell', New Statesman, 21 February 1959, Vol LVII, No. 1458, p. 252-4.

⁹⁸ Arnold Wesker, 'Letter: Prole Playwrights', New Statesman, 28 February 1959. Vol LVII, No.1459, p. 293.

⁹⁹ Quoted in Hayman, Arnold Wesker, p. 9. By the end of the 1960s the BBC writer's guide advised 'A word about some things in which we are definitely not interested: The "Kitchen Sink" sex, drugs, politics, the "Permissive Society" ' etc. Quoted in 'Diary', Black Dwarf, Vol. 14, No. 37, 5 September 1970, p. 16.

¹⁰⁰ CPA 1/8/7/1. 'Centre 42 Progress Report', June 1962.

and national playwrights, with a prize of £500 and the promise that it would be staged as part of the 1962 festivals. 1500 posters were sent to factories and offices in all of the festival towns yet only a handful of entries were received with none of them deemed suitable.

In Barker's policy statement, Centre 42's outlook and connection was predicated on the notion that 'the masses have an opinion that is worth expressing and listening to'. Thus, 'Perhaps the day of the new Athens is coming. Anyway, the day of Trades Union Theatres, Schools Theatres, Church Theatres - not the vicarage players but a dramatic form of workshop - is overdue. I can see all these things coming from a popular movement by the communities themselves'.¹⁰¹ The job of the artist was to aid the people in articulating their ideas and feelings. Of course, what *counted* as working-class life, its expression and concerns was not all-inclusive. Part of the work Barker had in mind was predicated upon the 'examining of roots ... if we are to develop (sic) a new British popular culture then we must make sure that it develop in harmony with its past'. And that past was located in the labour culture Centre 42 sought to connect with, the validation of a radical tradition and the exploration of 'authentic' instances of working-class culture, past and present.

At each of the festivals there were exhibits from contributing unions. One in particular portrayed union history and working life. Entitled 'Bread and Roses Too', it featured historical documents, murals and union banners, presenting a view of past, present and future. It was envisioned as 'an exhibition of the human endeavour, history and potentiality, the spirit of a movement which has developed from an

¹⁰¹ CPA 1/8/7/1. Barker, 'Recommendations on Centre 42 Policy', p. 6.

underground organisation to a great power for social and spiritual change'.¹⁰² Some of that spirit was conveyed in folk music which, as Wesker had argued, was relevant to the labour movement, 'since many of the songs in this field deal with miners, engine drivers, labourers and the armed forces, it was natural to seek ways of bringing these songs to our public'.¹⁰³ Folk performers at festivals included Ewan MacColl, A.L. Lloyd, Ann Briggs, et al, and performances were given in pubs and factories along with art exhibitions and poetry readings.

Wesker explored the value of folk in his most successful play, Chips With Everything which, along with the festivals, opened in 1962. This play follows a group of RAF conscripts through their national service training. Drawing upon personal experience, Wesker uses the tensions of this milieu to examine the enduring British class system and some contemporary cultural ideas and conflicts. Towards the end of the first act the men attend a Christmas party laid on for them by the officers. The odious Wing Commander reveals his estimation of them when he announces that in return he had expected 'A dirty recitation, or a pop song. I'm sure there's a wealth of native talent among you'.(Act 2, Scene 7). Pip Thompson, an upper-class recruit 'slumming' among the ranks, realises that the festivities are merely a cynical experiment. The representatives of the establishment seek confirmation of the docility and baseness of their subordinates. A surprise is in store however as Thompson encourages one soldier in a recitation of a dialect poem, and a minor battle of wills ensues. In turn, the officer encourages abandoned revelry and laughter, to the accompaniment of a rock'n'roll band engaged for the evening. In

¹⁰² CPA 1/8/7/1. Centre 42 Progress Report June 1962.

¹⁰³ Centre 42 Annual Report 1961-1962, p. 14.

response, Pip whispers into the ear of the guitarist who begins to play an arrangement of 'The Cutty Wren'. Quite spontaneously, the men join in the singing of this 'old peasant revolt song', which is delivered in a rather menacing manner, before the curtain falls.

This vignette neatly delineates the politics of taste and class that were at issue. The idea of a shoddy mass culture is there, with disdainful reference made to Elvis and pop music in general. In opposition is the sense of an 'authentic' culture, which threatens by its very nature to galvanise the men into action. By fault or design there is an implication that the knowledge and understanding of this folk music is an immanent quality of the men, individual and collective. In this same vein, Jazz was approved of and included in festivals as: 'the last of the authentic folk music'. One contemporary writer considered it to be a bridge between high art and the popular culture of the people, underlining its authenticity as 'free of the trammels of orthodox pseudo-culture'.¹⁰⁴ A '42 Jazz Band' played with George Melly compering. Original music composed by Tommy Watt included tunes like: 'Kicks for Rix', 'Wesker Leaps In' and 'TUC Twist'.¹⁰⁵

The man who forwarded Resolution 42 on behalf of the ACTT was Ralph Bond. A veteran CPGB member, Bond had previously argued that in order to resist the cultural imperialism of America and Hollywood, it was 'necessary to win the support of the millions of Trade Unionists'. Aiming at mass support for a progressive film movement it would then be possible to portray 'the great themes concerning our Labour movement ... the birth and progress of the Co-operatives; the

¹⁰⁴ Peter Worsley, 'The Spread of Jazz', *Listener*, Vol. XIX, No. 1772, 14 March 1963, p. 456.

¹⁰⁵ CPA 2/90/20. Poster for 'Jazz Dance', Hanwell Community Centre, Hayes, 24 November 1962.

story of the Tolpuddle Martyrs; the Peasants (sic) Revolt; and so on'.¹⁰⁶ Conceived in this spirit, one particularly noteworthy event of the 1962 festivals was a play entitled 'The Nottingham Captain'. A dramatised precursor of 'history from below', this was billed as 'A Moral for Narrator, Voices and Orchestra', the result of a weekend of frenzied work on Wesker's part after a writer commissioned to provide a play for the festivals failed to deliver. Theatre designer Herbert Marshal found a subject based upon Nottinghamshire local history and the head librarian of Nottingham Public Library supplied material. The play related the story of the rebellious 'Nottingham Captain' Jeremiah Brandreth in 'a story about a rigged government trial during the period of the Luddite risings'.¹⁰⁷

In The Making of the English Working Class, published a year later, E.P. Thompson described the Pentridge rising that Brandreth helped lead as 'one of the first attempts in history to mount a wholly proletarian insurrection, without any middle-class support'.¹⁰⁸ Nonetheless, using historical records the play gave monologues to the government spy 'Oliver', Lord Castlereagh and Jeremy Bentham. Lord Byron's first speech in the House of Lords was quoted too. In defence of the Nottingham rioters he asked 'Are we aware of our obligations to a mob? It is the mob that labour in your fields and serve in your houses, that man your navy, and

¹⁰⁶ Ralph Bond, 'Films', Arena: Special Issue: The U.S.A. Threat to British Culture, Vol. II, June/July 1951, p. 48. Bond had put these ideas before the TUC, calling for a motion to condemn 'films of brutality and violence'. See: Report of Proceedings at the 85th Annual Trades Union Congress, Co-operative Print Society, London, 1953, p. 319. Along with John Grierson, Bond started the Workers' Film Society in 1929, producing a series of newsreels entitled 'Workers' Topical News'. During the war he made instructional films for the Co-operative Society. After that, he started his own company Bond Films in order to distribute films of a politically radical nature. See Bert Hogenkamp, Deadly Parallels: Film and the Left in Britain, 1929-39, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1986, chapter 2; also his chapter 'The Sunshine of Socialism: the CPGB and Film in the 1950s' in Andy Croft (ed.), A Weapon in the Struggle: the Cultural History of the Communist Party in Britain, Pluto Press, London and Sterling, Virginia, 1998.

¹⁰⁷ Centre 42 Annual Report 1961-1962, p. 12.

recruit your army, that have enabled you to defy all the world, and can also defy you when neglect and calamity have driven them to despair'.¹⁰⁹ In Brechtian manner, it was didactic in its attempt to expose 'the way in which we can be fooled'.¹¹⁰ Placards carried about the stage announced that 'ALL LAW AND POLITICS ARE PERPETUAL EXPERIMENTS IN THE MEANS OF PROMOTING HAPPINESS'. Tape recordings and song commented on the action, voicing the hopes and concerns of the people themselves, that *'England, Ireland and France will rise/To end the poverty and lies'*. In Brechtian vein also it was performed in two versions - accompanied by a jazz score from Dave Lee and a classical score from Wilfred Josephs.

Clive Barker had proposed a symposium for 1962 with the aim of encouraging local authorities to develop tape-recording programmes in order to create libraries of the memories of ordinary people. He wrote that: 'I had a friend of mine making tapes on my recorder of the old people of Middlesborough telling their yarns and stories of the town before the turn of the century. The tapes made are fascinating, picturesque and contain some genuine examples of folk art in their display of language'.¹¹¹ Such histories could then be available for information and the creative inspiration of artists. Another idea, in response to requests from festival towns, was to make a series of low-budget films about ordinary lives, of their problems and conditions at work and play. One figure who actually developed this

¹⁰⁸ E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 733. See also pp. 720-25, 727-34.

¹⁰⁹ 'The Nottingham Captain' in Arnold Wesker, *Six Sundays in January*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1971, p. 44.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 60.

¹¹¹ CPA 1/8/7/1. Barker, 'Recommendations on Centre 42 Policy', p. 6.

kind of work was Charles Parker, Centre 42's most vociferous and aggressively romantic proselytiser for a working-class culture.

Responding to reports of the formation of Centre 42, Parker had been in touch with Barker in the Summer of 1961. He proposed a contribution based upon the possibilities of the Radio Ballads. Where Centre 42's attitude towards mass culture implied an antagonism to the modern media *per se*, Parker wrote that, 'I am, myself, more and more certain that the techniques developing in the new media are crying out to be used in conjunction with the longer established forms, and this will be one very important element in this vitally necessary process of, as you say, "breaking down the social mystique"'.¹¹² Barker was much taken with Parker's enthusiasm and vision, acknowledging that much of his Report owed a debt to his ideas. Despite this however, Parker took great exception to much of what Centre 42 seemed to represent.¹¹³

Wesker had said of his personal attitude to culture that 'I am talking about the need for society to produce a whole man'.¹¹⁴ Of course, this was a wholeness achieved through the appropriation of the good things in life too long denied the working classes. At work was an implicit qualitative distinction between 'them' and 'us'. 'They' have a good and fully developed life. 'They' are *already* the image of perfection, while 'we' have nothing except the cheap rubbish doled out as substitute for life, perforce 'we' live a degraded existence - 'we' *are* second-class! Parker on

¹¹² CPA 2/90/22. Letter, 17 July 1961, Charles Parker to Clive Barker. Dissatisfied members of Centre 42 who were later reported to have resigned over this and other issues included John McGrath (part creator of 'Z Cars'), Alun Owen and Clive Exton (television playwrights) and Steven Vinaver (scriptwriter for 'That Was The Week That Was'). Anon, 'Observations: Cultural Commissars', New Society, No. 41, 11 July 1963, p. 5.

¹¹³ CPA 2/90/22. Letter, 9 September 1961, Clive Barker to Charles Parker.

¹¹⁴ Quoted by Tom Maschler in his 'Introduction' to Arnold Wesker Fears of Fragmentation, p. 10.

the other hand was convinced of the creative values of a *genuine* and occasionally still living working-class culture. He said of Centre 42's aims that they seemed 'to betray an abysmal ignorance of the creations of folk art and of the richness of much urban and industrial "cultural activity" until recent years'. This was an impediment to the success of the venture in making contact with the people. He objected to what he saw as the Centre 42's 'false emphasis' on the 'the London dedicated, but in many respects ignorant artist' as an exceptional figure, who would bring 'real' values to the community. He suspected that most of those involved in Centre 42 paid only lip-service to a belief in the people they sought to serve. For him, the people themselves were the key to a better world: 'I believe that only when we find the way to release this creativity will we find the answers to the root problems of our generation'.¹¹⁵

In 1958 Parker began using a multimedia format in live events in order to express a Christian-humanitarian message and develop ideas of the Radio Ballad series. For instance, 'A Meditation for Good Friday' offered a combination of photographic stills, movie projections, monologues and scripture readings.¹¹⁶ Such work, alongside an annual nativity play called 'Dog in The Manger', tackled racism and other social iniquities. Parker also attempted to garner interest in a 'Workshop for the Arts' in Birmingham, seeking patronage from local dignitaries and the City council which had set a national precedent when it initiated the Cannon Hill Trust in order to build one of the country's first Arts Centres.¹¹⁷ With spectacular Utopian visions of Birmingham as 'a new Athens for the world at large', he suggested that

¹¹⁵ CPA 1/8/7/1. Letter, Charles Parker to Clive Barker, 12 September 1961.

¹¹⁶ CPA 1/8/8/3. Charles Parker, 'Dog in The Manger and After', mss., 8 January 1962, p. 1.

¹¹⁷ CPA 1/8/8/2. Letter, 16 December 1960, Charles Parker to Byng Kendrick; Letter, Charles Parker to H. Whatton, Chair - City of Birmingham General Purposes Committee (no date, circa December

'such an institution must draw its strength, not as does Glyndebourne for instance, from the peace of the Sussex countryside, but from the turmoil of a great industrial city'.¹¹⁸

Parker had also begun to work with 'The Clarion Singers', a local choir whose approach evinced its debt to the cultural politics of the 1930s. It was formed in 1940 by a Birmingham Doctor - Colin Bradsworth, a veteran of the International Brigade who had been inspired by the use of music amongst the Republican forces in Spain. The groups aims were inclusive, 'to make good music accessible to all in the belief that it can help men and women to work for the improvement of society, and to preserve and develop British Culture'.¹¹⁹ Alongside conventional classical pieces they also performed 'Chartist' songs such as 'The Land it is the Landlord's, 'A Hundred Years' and 'Fourpence a Day'. Parker got into trouble with the BBC when the choir's Katherine Thomson requested his help in a production of a version of The Ballad of John Axon.¹²⁰ Refusing to release copyright the Head of Midland Regional Programming objected on the grounds that its use 'could easily be considered a political purpose ... no matter what the shade of political opinion, either Left or Right'.¹²¹ Parker did eventually get involved in a production of 'The

1960). The MAC opened in March 1964.

¹¹⁸ CPA 1/8/8/2, Letter, 16 December 1960, Charles Parker to Byng Kendrick, pp. 2-3. Parker was given to imagining the Balsall Heath area of the city as a dormant powder keg of cultural possibilities that was akin to New Orleans. See Mike Coe, 'The Value of Dialect', Redbrick (University of Birmingham student newspaper), 17 October 1962, p. 6.

¹¹⁹ CPA2/91. 'Centre 42 Performance: The Lonesome Train'. 'Programme: Clarion Singers 21st Birthday Concert, "The Lonesome Train", 4 November, 1961', p. 4. Clarion had sung with Paul Robeson who became its honorary President. Clarion's Archive is held at Birmingham Central Library.

¹²⁰ CPA 2/91. Memo, 5 September 1960, Charles Parker to 'PH' and Assistant Head, Midland Regional Production.

¹²¹ CPA 2/91. Confidential Memo, 20 September 1960, David Parker, Head Midland Regional Programming, BBC to Charles Parker.

Lonesome Train', which he also later adapted for performance at the Centre 42 festivals.

Parker's desire was for a company and work that would 'demonstrate a cultural potential in the common people and in the existing traditional cultural patterns'.¹²² Where Centre 42 programmes would graciously announce that each festival was '*for* the people', his work would be *of* them, predicated on 'the controlled involvement of local resources and genius'.¹²³ What this meant in practice was that Parker spent several months gathering materials for a piece he had only vague ideas for, and a title: 'The Maker and The Tool'.

A highly impressionistic work, this told 'something of the history of man's technological mastery of his environment, but also posing the problem of the power which he now has and the dilemma which now in consequence confronts him, and ... the relationship of the governing and the governed'.¹²⁴ A trade from each town would serve to illuminate the common experience based upon an impulse signalled in Shelley's lines from 'Prometheus Unbound': 'We will make stronger combinations out of common things'. To this end Parker sought the guidance and approval of each local trades council about the appropriate trade that he should examine.¹²⁵ In the end these were Gas (Birmingham), Electronics (Hayes), Hosiery (Leicester), Docks (Bristol), Coalmining (Nottingham), The Boot and Shoe industries (Wellingborough). As in the Radio Ballad series, actuality recordings were to be a major ingredient, played as part of the eventual soundtrack. This aspect

¹²² CPA 1/8/8/3. Charles Parker, 'Dog in The Manger and After', p. 5.

¹²³ CPA 1/8/8/3. Charles Parker, 'Suggested production for 1962 Trade festivals', p. 2.

¹²⁴ CPA 2/90/8/41. 'Notes' for script, 'The Maker and the Tool'.

¹²⁵ City of Birmingham Central Library. 'File: Trade Union Festival 1961, Centre 42:

was coupled with detailed research into each industry which this in turn provided illustrative visuals - film, slides, sound effects and modern dance. In order to accentuate the local character of the events Parker also invited input from local photography, cine and audio clubs in each festival town.¹²⁶

Work proceeded as if art would spring naturally from the detail of life and labour. Recorded 'actuality' was forwarded to folk artists like Matt McGinn, Johnny Handle, Cyril Tawney and Enoch Kent as the basis of their songs. This meant that the authentic experience of working men talking about their work in their own words, and more importantly in their own dialects, should be allowed to *become* the fundamental matter of folk tunes. Handle, a Northumberland folk-singer, was commissioned to produce material about miners and mining. He conveys some of the essence of the project in its attempt to aestheticise the process of work, that 'I've discussed the tunes and script as I see them with the miners and surveyors and they agree about its closeness'.¹²⁷ Requesting film from the BFI, Parker wrote that 'I am thinking particularly of film sequences which will help my dance groups to begin to model their work on industrial movement than on Covent Garden. So if you know, or could find out any lyrical documentary work (lyrical in terms of human beings!) on the gas industry, coal mining, boot and shoe manufacture, hosiery, dock work and electronics, I would be very grateful'.¹²⁸ A quote from Bristol docker Bill Higgs underlined the *ouvrierisme* of 'the Maker and the Tool', that being a worker was 'to have dignity, be able to go to work and be able to walk up the street, hold your head

Correspondence, Memoranda, Leaflets etc. 'Birmingham Trades Council Minutes 19 April 1962'.

¹²⁶ E.g., CPA 2/90/20. Letter, 9 March 1962, Charles Parker to N.Robinson, Southall Tape Recording Group; CPA 2/90/15. Letter, 15 June 1962, Alan King to Charles Parker.

¹²⁷ CPA 2/90/11. Letter, Johnny Handle to Charles Parker.

in the air, feel that I'm proud to be a docker, to know that other people respect you for being a docker'. An accompanying song underlined the sentiment:

With a hammer in your hand

And skill at your command

You become a bigger man.

For there is creation, make a city, make a nation ...

*Make a world with a hammer in your hand.*¹²⁹

Thus, Parker sought to present working-class life as faithfully as possible to working-class audiences, underwritten by a humanist and spiritual perspective. Extant versions of the script are qualified by a mixture of Weskerish directions about the conception of the play and a Brechtian approach to breaking down the mystique of the theatrical event. Rather than the 'Princes' who form the normal focus of stage and screen the focus here was on 'the voices of real people', their lives and their concerns. Successful contact could only be gauged if the formal address of 'ladies and gentlemen' has sincerely moved to a call to 'brothers and sisters'. All action was displayed on rostrum and bare stage, which would show the company's preparations. This was based upon a concern that they familiarise the audience with themselves as *human beings*,

eschewing all advantages of surprise and shock tactics as suitable only to a theatre conceived as warfare. Our purpose is to present this audience to itself,

¹²⁸ CPA 2/90/14. Letter (undated - most likely early-mid 1962), Charles Parker to Paddy Whannel, BFI.

¹²⁹ Original songs written for 'The Maker and the Tool', and based around the process of work, included Enoch Kent's 'Matrix Waulking Song' and 'Electronics Made in Hayes'; Beryl Price's 'With a Hammer in Your Hand' and 'The Hand of Man'; Johnny Handle's 'The New Machine' and 'Once I had a Pick and Shovel'; Matt McGinn 'It Breathes' (About shoe leather); Ian Campbell, 'Apprentice Song' and Cyril Tawney, 'The Old Docker's Song'.

and our powers in technical equipment and resources are so over-whelming in creating effect, that all efforts must be made to humanise the activity ... We are all engaged in an exciting experiment - in deliberate corporate creation of a radical form of theatre - we - author, cast, audience - are all the Makers, and we are all the Tools.¹³⁰

The exploration of the everyday was celebrated and afforded profundity by anchoring it to the themes of myth, religion and cultural classics. The commentary on work was matched by extracts from Handel and readings from poetical works and the bible. In the planning stages, Parker wrote that the work was to draw upon the Prometheus myth from versions by Aeschylus and Shelly. Likewise, he found inspiration in the story of Noah, writing that 'in the Mystery plays the Noah play is always that most associated with the crafts ... and the idea of man by his hands making the vessel of his own salvation can be given a philosophical interpretation to meet this idea I have'.¹³¹

Despite an array of troubles in pre-production, 'The Maker and the Tool' did eventually perform at each festival in 1962, presented under the auspices of a company Parker called 'The Leaveners'. The energy that he ploughed into his work for Centre 42 was remarkable - over 90 tapes were made of actuality during his research. Roy Shaw reported of Parker that he 'drives himself harder than his performers', although when they played Leicester Co-operative Hall the *whole* company had rehearsed throughout the previous night.¹³² 'The Maker and the Tool' was one of the few success of the festivals. For Michael Kustow it was the one thing

¹³⁰ CPA 2/90/8/2. 'The Maker and the Tool', Script, first draft, p. 1.

¹³¹ CPA 2/90/16. Letter, 9 July 1962, Charles Parker to Johnny Handle.

that 'got closest, and then only in glimpses, to finding some elements of this common language of work and art. All of our other work was either straight-forward professional entertainment ... or else work which was marked in some way by what the artists believe to be the flesh and blood of the working-class vision of the world'. Thus, for him, 'The Nottingham Captain' was a 'juggling dilettante' while Ewan MacColl's songs were too nostalgic for a time when struggles were simply 'black and white'. The folk music expressed 'The cult of the craftsman, "the deification of sweat". The trap of calling a vision of universal brotherhood that brings a lump too easily to the throat'.¹³³ On the practical ramifications of this issue, New Society reported that local people regarded the artificial importation of poetry reading and folk-playing into pubs and factories as invasions of privacy. This was not due to a lack of welcome or interest but rather because of the fact that the performers were strangers and their work had no relationship 'to the poetry and songs of the locality, about which they know nothing. Consequently the existing cultural structure, which in old towns will be complex and valuable, is ignored, the local people slighted, and the aims of Centre 42 vitiated'.¹³⁴

Centre 42 acknowledged that factory recitals of music and poetry were a continuation of the CEMA wartime tradition 'when popular concerts and soloists were enthusiastically applauded by a nation in search of a unifying national identity. Since that period of crisis the tradition has died and we felt it worthwhile returning to it'.¹³⁵ While CEMA had prospered thanks to the camaraderie of war, no truce

¹³² Roy Shaw, 'Caviare with Everything', New Society, No. 4, 25 October 1962, p. 25.

¹³³ Michael Kustow, 'Centre 42: What did we achieve?', Tribune, 11 January, 1963, p. 6.

¹³⁴ Anon, 'Observations: Cultural Commissars', New Society, No 41, 11 July 1963, p. 5.

¹³⁵ Centre 42 Annual Report 1961-1962, p. 16.

existed to aid Centre 42. The poet Christopher Logue felt that many events were disasters. The first one in Wellingborough took place at the ‘incredibly ugly’ locale of Copeland and Jenkins, ‘a cross between Eastney Barracks and Banstead Lunatic Asylum’.¹³⁶ There was a palpable shock for him in bringing art to places not conducive to the contemplative ambience necessary for its creation and appreciation: trains steamed through the site while on a nearby canal, barges hooted incessantly. Faced with this affront, Logue and two folk-singers (complete with aeolian pipes) turned tail. A date that they did keep was at the Raleigh Bicycle factory in Nottingham, former workplace of novelist Alan Sillitoe and, of course, his creation Arthur Seaton. The reading took place in the canteen, which was crowded and noisy. Opening the session, teenage folksinger Anne Briggs failed to make any impression. This caused Logue to bridle ““Look, she’s fifteen years old. She’s come a long way to sing you morons a song. And all you can do is give her the bird. I’m going to clap, and when I do, you’ll join in””. No-one clapped. Optimistically, the poet countered with a version of ‘Antigone’, noting to himself that while he announced that the earth’s greatest wonder was man, about him he played pontoon, read the daily paper and filled in pools coupons.¹³⁷

In its promotional literature, Centre 42 used D.H. Lawrence’s poem ‘A Sane Revolution’ to punctuate its ethos:

*If you make a revolution, make it for fun,
don’t do it in ghastly seriousness,*

¹³⁶ Christopher Logue, ‘The Poet at the Canteen Table’, *The Sunday Times*, 27 January 1963, p. 22. Logue’s experience was dramatised by Wesker in a TV play ‘Menace’, see *Six Sundays in January*.

¹³⁷ A similar response was reported at a Leicester folk song event. Roy Shaw, ‘Caviare With

don't do it in deadly earnest,

do it for fun.

The sense is that the events were anything *but* fun. (Practically speaking, there is the perverse decision to stage them in October and November to consider as well). There was obvious bemusement and tension between those who were deemed to be the 'audience' and Centre 42's young bohemians with their alien culture. There was suspicion of the way in which operatives were 'liberally sprinkled with CND badges'.¹³⁸ As the Manchester Guardian reported: 'Observers at some events ... might have wondered from the beards and duffle coats if it was not a trades union festival at all but, as one person put it, a get-together of Left Wing intellectuals. Indeed, one or two of the older patrons were critical of the highly-committed and venomous anti-establishment tone of some of the writing and doubtful if the artists taking part were making much contact with the trade union masses for whom the festival was intended'.¹³⁹ Even festival programmes were introduced with an essay asking why would 'case-hardened' members become involved so suddenly with such a venture? Were they being duped by 'the long-haired boys (and girls)?'¹⁴⁰

In Birmingham, the Secretary of the Trades Council, Harry Baker, reported approvingly of the festival there that 'to me it appears that the various performances were presented with precision and high technical skill, nothing was shoddy or cheap ... Never in my experience ... has such favourable publicity been received by the

Everything', p. 25.

¹³⁸ Anthony Hancox, 'Into Battle (In the Name of Culture): Hamlet versus Bonanza', Sunday Mercury, 21 October 1962, p. 10.

¹³⁹ Peter Ford, 'Centre 42 Goes West', Manchester Guardian, 12 November 1962, p. 12.

¹⁴⁰ E.g. 'Trades Unions and the Festivals', Fortytwo: For the People of Nottingham, pp. 4-5.

According the Hancox George Woodcock had been on television warning against such people and their effect on the movement. 'Into battle (In the Name of Culture)' See also Mynard, 'Why Should a

Trade Union Movement'.¹⁴¹ Yet other members commented on the problems and occasional chaos that were the result of confused scheduling, poor advertising and organisation.¹⁴² This resulted in a serious disparity between what Centre 42 proposed and what actually took place, with a poor image for all concerned, undermining the aim to 'keep faith with the public'. It was felt that Centre 42 representatives had spurned the freely offered help of local Council members and that any further events needed close control from the Trades Council itself. One member complained 'that it was impossible to sell tickets or give them away. The Art Gallery show was too high-brow'. Similarly, Stravinsky was 'more than he could stomach', a give-away brochure was 'off-putting' and the audiences 'not our people'. This was a common cause for concern, 'the audiences were not Trade Union audiences'. A TGWU representative said that the event 'had not touched the working class one iota', another reported as being 'Very critical. No under-dogs at performances - all middle class. No working class audiences. No factory girls. No reason to be complacent about our success'. Those in Leicester were equally critical. The Trade Union exhibit was confusing for many and 'altogether they found it uninspiring'.¹⁴³ Others did feel that a big impact had been made on the perception of Trade Unionism in the area, although Centre 42 was foregrounded over Union work yet 'more events should take place on housing estates and at times when women could participate'.

Trades Council Present Such a Festival?', p. 8.

¹⁴¹ File: Birmingham Trade Union Festival. Harry Baker, 'Secretary's Report to Birmingham Trades Council, 27 October 1962, re: festival week 21-27 October 1962'.

¹⁴² File: Birmingham Trade Union Festival. 'Report of Trades Council Debate on Secretary's Report on Festival' (No date, probably 3 November 1962, no page).

¹⁴³ File: Birmingham Trade Union Festival. Leicester Trade Union Festival Committee. 'Minutes of Meeting 2 November 1962'.

Roy Shaw suggested that the gloating attitude of the Wing Commander in Wesker's Chips With Everything was akin to that of those who revelled in the failure of Centre 42. In fact, the festivals received so much negative press that Geoffrey Reeves labelled Centre 42 'The Biggest Aunt Sally of Them All'.¹⁴⁴ In his play, Wesker expresses his own sense of pessimism, with the men relapsing into 'Knees Up Mother Brown' after their moment of consciousness. By the end of the play, their 'cultured' champion Pip abandons them to 'their chips with everything'.¹⁴⁵ Wesker was reported to have been disappointed with the overall standard of the festivals, laying the blame mainly on the restricted funds available.¹⁴⁶ He was optimistic however, insistent that 'there was a feeling in all sorts of areas of the rank and file that 42 was at last something they'd all been waiting for because it measured up to their concept of the good, the marvellous life that Socialism had always been about'.¹⁴⁷ Yet the coruscating self-criticism expressed in the post-festival annual report amounted to a point-by-point dismissal of its whole ethos. In fact, what was expressed was not so much dissatisfaction with the majority effort of those in the organisation than with the audience itself.

Some professional artists refused to be exhibited alongside amateurs. Diplomatically, the report suggested that 'to exhibit work of local artists simply because it is local and "untutored" would be patronisation of the worst kind'. Children's art was confined to the under-twelves as the work of older children would

¹⁴⁴ Geoffrey Reeves, 'The Biggest Aunt Sally of Them All: Some Notes on the Centre 42 Festivals', Encore, Vol.10, No.1, January- February 1963, pp. 8-16.

¹⁴⁵ Shaw, 'Caviare with Everything', p. 25.

¹⁴⁶ Anon, "'Was Festival Worth £2,000?" Unions Ask', Sunday Mercury, 28 October 1962, p. 5.

¹⁴⁷ Quoted in Hayman, Arnold Wesker, p. 12.

performance be 'too inhibited, derivative, and therefore uninteresting',¹⁴⁸. There was a 'weakness' in the nature of performing folk in pubs, dances were lacking in 'any sense of event'.¹⁴⁹ Manuscripts received from those responding to the play writing competition were too much under the 'influence of television'. Even local involvement in the Trade Union Exhibitions was unsatisfactory, the 'well intentioned but unselective all-togetherness' resulted in 'mediocre bonhomie'.¹⁵⁰

In I'm Talking About Jerusalem, when Ronnie Khan is told that visions don't work, he replies that they do: 'And even if they don't work then for God's sake let's try and behave as though they do - or else nothing will work' (Act 3, Scene 2). That Centre 42 had any further life is testament to Wesker's own faith and idealism. Wesker said that 'at the height of 42 I really was capable of selling up almost everything and raising money for 42. I would go to extremes'.¹⁵¹ He had very little artistic success over the next few years, if ever again, and Centre 42 itself simply ran out of steam.¹⁵² After the festivals the organisation was in bad shape financially. When the TUC convened in the following year, the General Council reported that some unions were upset at the bills that local branches had run up in organising elaborate festivals.¹⁵³ Centre 42 itself had run up an overdraft of £40,000. Attempting to offset this debt, £10,000 was solicited from the Calouste Gulbenkian

¹⁴⁸ Centre 42 Annual Report 1961-1962, p. 17.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 14

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 15. By way of comparison, a Trades Council Festival in Leeds that did similar things at the same time, albeit without Centre 42 aid, was also a disaster. As reported in Anon, 'Poor Response to Festival: Content to Watch', Manchester Guardian, 11 September 1962, p. 2.

¹⁵¹ Quoted in Hayman, Arnold Wesker, p. 3.

¹⁵² E.g., see Malcolm Page, 'Whatever happened to Arnold Wesker? His Recent Plays', Modern Drama, No. 11, 1968, pp. 317-325.

¹⁵³ Report of the Proceedings at the 95th Annual Trades Union Congress, September 2-6 1963, Co-operative Print Society, London, 1963, p. 128. See also, John Cole, 'Three Tons of Coal Among the Artists', Manchester Guardian, 25 April 1963, p. 1.

Foundation and £15,000 from appeals. 545 letters sent to 'Industry' raised only £250 while 630 letters to MPs resulted in a desultory £70. As a result of such support, Raymond Williams was being optimistic when he said that 'It would be an act of justice, by a Labour Government, to make a special grant' to Centre 42.¹⁵⁴ Although in 1963, thanks to Jennie Lee, now Minister for the Arts, Wesker got the ear of Harold Wilson for over three hours to talk about the project. Yet when presentation was made to the Arts Council, it side-stepped requests for a grant by making an unsuccessful representation directly to the Treasury on its behalf.¹⁵⁵

While it was facing its 'period of adjustment' twenty more towns did request Centre 42 visits, including Liverpool, Sheffield, Newcastle, Manchester, Cardiff, Middlesbrough and Boston. These were scheduled for 1964.¹⁵⁶ In the mean time, the spirit of the organisation was to be spread with travelling exhibits that would continue to visit pubs, betting shops, factories and doctors' waiting-rooms. Yet despite attempts to maintain momentum, further events that did take place were spectacularly unsuccessful. A 'jazz dance' fund-raiser in 1963 at Birmingham Town Hall drew so few people that the band outnumbered the audience.¹⁵⁷ Finally, for all of the attempts to reach out to the regions and the industrial heartlands that were deemed to be its true constituency, Centre 42 retrenched about a London-based project to create a cultural hub at the Roundhouse.¹⁵⁸ Thus, Coppetiers has described

¹⁵⁴ Raymond Williams, 'Labour's Cultural Policy', *Views*, No. 5, Summer 1964, p. 44.

¹⁵⁵ See Pearson, 'Wesker's Centre 42', p. 4.

¹⁵⁶ Pearson, 'Wesker's Centre 42', p. 4.

¹⁵⁷ Anon, 'Trades Council Jazz Ball is a flop: Band outnumbers Dancers!', *Birmingham Planet*, 17 October 1963, p. 2.

¹⁵⁸ On Tees-side WEA worker David Craig was active in a local 'Friends of Centre 42' group. Commissioned by Stockton Trades Council, they planned an ambitious festival for May Day 1964. See David Craig, 'Who Enjoys The Arts?', *Views*, Spring 1964, p. 30.

this as 'the first symptom of decline rather than the hoped-for symbol of imminent achievement'.¹⁵⁹

Appositely the Roundhouse, which was situated in Chalk Farm 'in suitably proletarian surroundings', could boast of an industrial heritage - it had been a locomotive shed for the London and Birmingham Railway.¹⁶⁰ Lately a storehouse for Gilbey's Gin it was abandoned in 1966. Wesker badgered the building's owner Louis Mintz to prove his colours as a patron of the arts and donate the lease to the property to him. Even with Mintz's generosity there were still £600,000 worth of improvements needed, although only a quarter of that amount was raised in the next few years. To Wesker's chagrin, the site became more successful and renowned for its associations with the burgeoning counter-culture.¹⁶¹ It provided a temporary home for the experimental 'Living Theatre' of Judith Malina and Julian Beck and was a hub of rock and roll concerts and events such as 'Angry Arts Week', and the launch party for International Times.¹⁶² The success and notoriety of such events was a physical testimony to the changing times and the way in which the contribution of Centre 42 would be obscured by a new generation of radicals. One report on the 'Congress for the Dialectics of Liberation' held at the Roundhouse in July 1967, opined that 'I doubt if Centre 42 will see as much real creativity in ten years as we saw in these two weeks ... And I doubt if when the Roundhouse has

¹⁵⁹ Coppieters, 'Arnold Wesker's Centre Fortytwo', p. 37.

¹⁶⁰ Jonathan Green, All Dressed Up: The Sixties and the Counterculture, Pimlico, London, 1999, p. 153.

¹⁶¹ Wesker's plans for the building are outlined in a letter to Rene Allio, French stage designer, architect and collaborator of Roger Planchon. See 'The Allio Brief', Fears of Fragmentation. On the differences between Wesker's vision and those of groups of the late 1960s, see: Heinz Zimmerman, 'Wesker and Utopia in the Sixties', Modern Drama, Vol.29, No.2, 1986, pp. 185-206.

¹⁶² Arthur Marwick, The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c. 1958-C.1974, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 340-4 and Roger Hutchinson, High Sixties:

become Arnold Wesker's Palace of Culture, the local Chalk Farm kids will come within spitting distance of it. Or if they do, it will probably be to break a window or chalk rude words on the newly smart walls, not to recite poems and hand out flowers'.¹⁶³ Wesker's The Old Ones was staged there; a dismal artistic, critical and commercial flop, it was succeeded by the notorious Oh! Calcutta!¹⁶⁴ Resigning from the Roundhouse Trust in 1970 Wesker persuaded the Council of Centre 42 to pass a resolution dissolving itself.

Wesker said of his experience that 'I will go on record with a hundred per cent prophecy that things like Centre 42 will be existing all over the country sooner or later. All that's happened is that I've failed to bring it about'.¹⁶⁵ Despite his own criticisms of the festivals, Michael Kustow too wrote that Centre 42's effect would be 'much more gradual ... important as a growing point in what must be a long, long, pull'.¹⁶⁶ What was important was that people had tried to refocus their approaches to cultural work, to make contact, to involve the audience in lessons about poetry, song-writing, paintings and so on. Contact *had* been made with existing cultural groups and Arts Committees. New ones had been established: 'out of such local activity new works, tied to a particular way of life in the community, but expressed in a immediate and direct manner, might spring ... an awareness of all kinds of possibilities existing in the everyday world of work and routine'.¹⁶⁷ This might be an overestimation of the rootedness of what Centre 42 did achieve and, while it was not the sole precursor of community theatre, arts centres, worker-writers groups et al, it

The Summer of Riot and Love, Mainstream, Edinburgh, 1992, pp. 90-92.

¹⁶³ A. Fearon, Peace News, 25 August 1967, quoted in Green, All Dressed Up, p. 208.

¹⁶⁴ See Green, All Dressed Up, pp. 344-9.

¹⁶⁵ Quoted in Hayman, Arnold Wesker, p.

was symptomatic of the impulses that lead to such projects. Demystifying art, making it accessible, breaking down the boundaries of culture and connecting with audiences - these were all key to work that came out of it and which followed in its wake.

Some of this was developed by those involved in Centre 42. Along with the playwright Shelagh Delany, Clive Barker sought to develop community theatre in Manchester, 'trying to find the new form ... that can say and articulate what needs to be said about our society'.¹⁶⁸ Writing more recently, Kershaw has suggested that 'The Maker and the Tool' was the only genuine innovation of Centre 42, and Parker's group 'The Leaveners' sought to expand upon this.¹⁶⁹ Their ethos and aims were outlined in a draft constitution. These included the preparation of 'dramatic and other work with the express purpose of re-discovering and asserting the popular tradition ... To encourage and develop creative cultural activity amongst the widest sections of the people and especially in the industrial community of the Midlands ... giving expression to the creative potential of the common people, as the only true basis of art, as of society'.¹⁷⁰ Alongside the development of 'The Maker and the Tool', other abortive plans included treatments of the Trade Union Movement, The

¹⁶⁶ Kustow, 'Centre 42: What Did We Achieve?', p. 6.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ CPA 2/90/11. Letter, 10 December 1962, Clive Barker to Katherine Thomson.

¹⁶⁹ Kershaw, *The Politics of Performance*, p. 106. Seeking an innovative approach Wesker himself attempted to imitate this form in an abortive work entitled 'Circles of Perception': 'in terms of technical structure I used just about everything - slides, films, the Czech device of 'Laterna Magica'...' Quoted on <http://www.arnoldwesker.com/other.htm> 11 April 2001. His *Their Very Own and Golden City*, a play written in 1963-65 was a veiled dramatisation of his experiences of Centre 42. In fact, in its original staging it owed much to 'The Maker and The Tool' with its use of a back-projection of Durham Cathedral and tape-recording of Bach organ music.

¹⁷⁰ CPA 2/90/11. 'The Leaveners: Draft Constitution, 14 March 1963'. Also, CPA 1/8/8/1. 'Letter 30 April 1963, Charles Parker to Arnold Wesker/Centre 42'. CPA 2/90/24. Letter, 24 January 1963, Ralph Stevenson, BFI to Charles Parker. re: experimental film fund, live event at the NFT. Parker tried to get Birmingham City Council to fund a permanent base for the group.

Great War, the General Strike, the building of the railways and the Peasant's Revolt.¹⁷¹

Parker's work was an obvious prompt to that of Peter Cheeseman at the Victoria Theatre in Stoke which opened in October 1962. Originally established for Stephen Joseph's 'Theatre-in-The Round', it set about 'celebrating the local community', utilising local history sources, folk music, oral testimonies and recordings in the manner of Parker's Radio Ballads.¹⁷² Cheeseman's company worked collectively, producing 'plays by committees'.¹⁷³ The aim was to ensure the sound of a multiplicity of voices over the 'poetic vision' of the individual artist, 'dedicated to the idea of giving expression to the life of our new home community'.¹⁷⁴ The Jolly Potters, a 1964 production concerned the Chartist riots of 1842 while aspects of local labour history and radical politics were dealt with in 1965's The Staffordshire Rebels and The Knotty in 1966.¹⁷⁵

In 1963, playwrights John Arden and Margaretta D'Arcy offered a radical project that was advertised in direct contrast to the size and ambition of Centre 42. They were then living in Kirkbymoorside in Yorkshire, amongst 'the scum of the

¹⁷¹ CPA 1/8/8/1, 'The Leaveners: Agenda, meeting 3 February 1963'. In 1965 the Royal Shakespeare Society planned a production at the Aldwych Theatre entitled 'Strike'. This was to be a documentary theatre production based on the events of 1926 with a script by Clive Barker. It was cancelled in pre-production. This is documented in CPA 2/110.

¹⁷² Peter Cheeseman, quoted in Robin Thornber, 'First Tragedy ... Then Farce: the Regional reps' in Craig, Dreams and Deconstructions, p. 170.

¹⁷³ Peter Cheeseman, 'Introduction and Production Notes', The Knotty: A Musical Documentary, Methuen, London, 1970, p. xv. See also Peter Cheeseman, 'A Community Theatre-in-the-Round' and Production Casebook on 'The Staffordshire Rebels' in Theatre Quarterly, Vol. 1, No.1, 1971, and Fight for Shelton Bar: A Documentary from the Victoria Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, with introduction and notes by Peter Cheeseman, Methuen, London, 1980. Parker did lead a workshop in documentary technique. See: CPA 1/3/1/11. 'Lectures Given by Charles Parker', correspondence, papers et al, for a day on documentary work at Victoria theatre, Stoke.

¹⁷⁴ Cheeseman, 'Introduction and Production Notes', p. x.

¹⁷⁵ For accounts see Itzin, Stages in the Revolution, pp. 24-38 and Kershaw, The Politics of Performance, pp. 107 ff.

earth and the beggars' as one local commented.¹⁷⁶ An ad in Encore read that Arden 'has conceived the idea of establishing a free Public Entertainment in his house ... No specific form of entertainment is envisaged but it is hoped that in the course of it the forces of Anarchy, Excitement and Expressive Energy latent in the most apparently sad person shall be given release'.¹⁷⁷

In the area of literature, worker-writer groups of the 1970s aimed 'to demystify the process by which words get into print'. Manchester's Gatehouse Project, and Hackney Writer's Workshop provided readings in pubs and prisons. As Dorset's Word and Action Publications proclaimed, 'We grew out of the nationwide movement in community Arts which challenged the outdated belief that culture is the property of a highly educated minority, to be found only in the theatres, arts centre and museums of our larger cities; or between the glossy covers of an expensively promoted book'.¹⁷⁸ Whatever the success or failure of the stated aims of this movement, one of its considerable legacies is the more recent boom in small publishing houses that focus on local histories and the autobiographies of ordinary people.¹⁷⁹

I have already suggested how Alan Sinfield is somewhat unfair in his representation of Centre 42 and the attitude of those on the New Left towards

¹⁷⁶ Quoted in Kershaw, The Politics of Performance, p. 112. Arden made his name with The Waters of Babylon (1957) at the Royal Court, a play about an exploitative slum landlord. Live Like Pigs (1958) dealt with life on a housing estate while Serjeant Musgrave's Dance (1959) was set in a Northern colliery town in the late nineteenth century, mixing social allegory, history, folk ballad and verse. His later work was associated with the counter-culture of the late 1960s.

¹⁷⁷ Quoted in Kershaw, The Politics of Performance, p. 107.

¹⁷⁸ See: Dave Morley and Ken Worpole (eds), The Republic of Letters: Working Class Writing and Local Publishing, Comedia, London, London, p. 152.

¹⁷⁹ For an account, see Paul Long, "'But it's not all nostalgia": Public History in Birmingham' in Hilda Kean, Paul Martin and Sally Morgan (eds), Seeing History: Public History Now in Britain, Francis Boutle, London, 2000, pp. 127-148.

culture. He writes that: 'If the working class appeared passive, losing its cultural cohesion, reactionary and infatuated with trivial consumer goodies, then upwardly mobile intellectuals were justified in leaving it'.¹⁸⁰ Of course, he seeks to evaluate the politics of what he terms left-culturalism, celebrating its aims despite the fact that 'going to the Royal Court isn't going to change society, and that folk music wasn't really the music of the people'.¹⁸¹ Yet, however vague, and with its varied results, what Centre 42 collectively expressed was a *refusal* to leave alone the working class, based on the belief that cultural things were relevant and should and could connect with and change their lives.

What needs to be said is that the latter generation of radicals were no less guilty of 'cultural imperialism' so-called, than those involved in Centre 42. Their approach, underwritten so often by Marxist theory, was predicated on a belief that it had some kind of essential connection with working-classness and how it *should* be. For instance, despite his complaint about Wesker's attitude towards the working class, John McGrath later wrote that 'Just as we need to reassess critically the forms of popular entertainment as we use them, so we must reassess our audience's ideology ... and much of working-class life is backward and reactionary ... therefore, I think, a great deal of popular theatre has got to be "about" a socialist criticism of the audience'.¹⁸² The point here is not that Wesker needs defending but to acknowledge how arbitrary the positions have been, that claim to deny 'bourgeois'

¹⁸⁰ Alan Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1989, p. 265.

¹⁸¹ Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain*, p. 266.

¹⁸² John McGrath, *A Good Night Out: Popular Theatre: Audience, Class and Form*, Nick Hern Books, London, 1996 (first published 1981), pp. 96-97.

values and forms, instead seeking 'proletarian' and 'progressive' ideas and forms instead.

Chapter Six.

A Quiet Revolution?

Class, Culture and Creativity in Post-War Education.

In 1941, the social historian G.M.Trevelyan commented that 'If we win this war, it will have been won in the primary and secondary schools'.¹ With rather a benign view of the British educational system, what he had in mind was how it had inculcated the skills and unity of identity necessary to victory. Yet this comment also serves to describe the rewards of the 'people's peace' and the egalitarian project of the post-war settlement.

Looking back from 1978 the Times Higher Educational Supplement suggested that changes in education had resulted in what it described as a 'quiet revolution'.² This revolution began in primary schools initially, spreading to the secondary level in the 1950s before reaching its zenith in about 1966. However, Peter Cunningham has suggested that little attention has been paid to the experience of education in relation to political, social and economic changes. In particular, he claims that 'The lived curriculum of the classroom has been badly neglected by historians'.³

¹ G. M Trevelyan, English Social History: A Survey of Six Centuries, Chaucer to Queen Victoria, Longmans, London, 1944, p. 586, n. 1 (1941).

² 'Leader: The Quiet Revolution', Times Higher Educational Supplement, 1 December, 1978, No.368, p. 368.

³ Peter Cunningham, Curriculum Change in the Primary School Since 1945: Dissemination of the Progressive Ideal, The Falmer Press, London, 1988, p. 2. Although see: W.E. Marsden (ed.), Post-War Curriculum Development: An Historical Appraisal, The History of Education Society, Conference Papers December 1978, Leicester, 1979, esp. Peter Gordon, "A Unity of Purpose": Some Reflections on the School Curriculum, 1945-70'.

One possible task in response to this neglect would be to track the dissemination of work by Wesker, Parker or Hoggart through the curriculum; it was certainly received with enthusiasm by teachers. Likewise, we could account for the way in which the discourse of the folk revival and 'peoples' history' wended their way into schools.⁴ These things are important, but what I seek to do here is examine how independent developments in education respected and encouraged the majority to speak and write about their lives in particular ways. For instance, Carolyn Steedman has written of the cultivation of selfhood in children through practices of creative writing in schools, generating what she labels 'State-Sponsored Autobiography'. She suggests that there was a proliferation of children's writing from the 1950s onward that can be attributed to 'the pedagogical convictions of teachers working within a progressive framework'.⁵

Considering this framework in the context of this 'Aesthetics of Class' offers some highly original insights into the relationship of progressivism and class. The origin of progressive pedagogies can be traced to the Enlightenment, to texts like Rousseau's *Émile* (1762), and to the Romantic Movement. Key to its development in Britain were influential figures like Margaret McMillan, Homer Lane, Maria Montessori, Percy Nunn, Molly Brearly, Christian Schiller, Leonard Marsh and Sybil Marshall.⁶ While there has been considerable dispute about the extent of the

⁴ E.g., the examination of the Peterloo massacre led to its dramatisation in one Manchester school, as related by John Hipkin, 'A Play That Came to Life', *Use of English*, Vol. XVIII, No.2, Winter 1966, p. 123.

⁵ Carolyn Steedman, 'State-Sponsored Autobiography' in (eds), Becky Conekin, Frank Mort and Chris Walters, *Moments of Modernity: Reconstructing Britain 1945-1964*, Rivers Oram Press, London York, 1999, p. 52. See also her 'Writing the Self: the End of the Scholarship Girl', in Jim McGuigan (ed.), *Cultural Methodologies*, Sage Publications, London et al, 1997, pp. 106-125.

⁶ See: R.J.W. Selleck, *English Primary Education and The Progressives, 1914-1939*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1972; W.A.C. Stewart, *Progressives and Radicals in English Education, 1750-*

impact of progressivism on British education, my contention here is that as a consequence of practices and policies authorised and informed by the progressive ethos there was an attempted *rapprochement* between an 'official' culture and working class culture, worked out in the classroom. To some degree, teachers were encouraged to accept and respect working-class life, to understand that it had a 'culture' worthy of acknowledgement. Theoretically, working-class life could not simply be damned, rejected or escaped from through an introduction to high culture. Instead, it formed a respectable topic for exploration. Most pertinent to this thesis was the way in which this attention to working-class life informed a variety of creative, aesthetic activities and practices.

This development registered most notably in the teaching of English. The importance of this subject was underlined by one official report that insisted, "“English”, literature as well as language, is ... the central expression of English life and culture and ... the central subject in the education of every English child of every age and every grade of intelligence'.⁷ The individuals whose work is traced below, figures like Harold Rosen, David Holbrook, F.D. Flower and Frank Whitehead, have been described as part of 'a shining generation who transformed the teaching of English in secondary schools'.⁸ In doing so they also challenged the definition and common-sense notions of 'English' as a subject. Thus, it is here, in the successes and failures of this project, that the notion of the *mentalités* of the post-war era finds its most substantial support.

1970, Macmillan, London, 1972 and Carolyn Steedman, Childhood, Culture and Class in Britain: Margaret McMillan, 1860-1931, Virago, London, 1990.

⁷ Ministry of Education, Language: Some Suggestions for Teachers of English and Others in Primary and Secondary Schools and in Further Education. (Ministry of Education, Pamphlet No.26), HMSO,

As I have already suggested, social histories of language have had little to say about the post-war period, which is surprising given the way in which pedagogies of talk were developed in schools.⁹ Similarly, some social histories of English teaching and the centrality of the idea of ‘culture’ to British life have also neglected more recent developments.¹⁰ Where work has been done in this area it was conceived as a contribution to debates about education and often as a polemical evaluation of new methods and the impulse of social justice. David Shayer, Margaret Mathieson and David Allen have all offered insights in this respect, but their work is also in need of historicisation for the way in which their political and epistemological assumptions have waned.¹¹ By this I mean that what is apparent in their work on education is that overtly or not, class *is* an issue. As I suggest in the Introduction, it is clear that this is no longer the case.¹²

It is intriguing to note that that no historians of education, let alone social and cultural historians have paid much attention to the obvious disappearance of class as a major category in educational debates. *This* neglect is all the more

London, 1961 (first published 1954), p. 49.

⁸ Elaine Millard, ‘Obituary: Frank Whitehead’, *NATE News*, Autumn 1998, p. 17.

⁹ E.g., Tony Crowley, *The Politics of Discourse: The Standard Language Question in British Cultural Debates*, Macmillan, Houndmills, Basingstoke, 1989; Gerry Knowles, *A Cultural History of the English Language*, Arnold, London et al, 1997, and Dick Leith, *A Social History of English*, Routledge, London, 1983.

¹⁰ E.g., Chris Baldick, *The Social Mission of English Criticism 1848-1932*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1987; Ian Hunter, *Culture and Government: The Emergence of Literary Education*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1988 and Brian Doyle, *English and Englishness*, Methuen, London, 1989.

¹¹ David Shayer, *The Teaching of English in Schools: 1900-1970*, Routledge, London and Boston, 1970; Margaret Mathieson, *The Preachers of Culture*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1975; David Allen, *English Teaching Since 1965: How Much Growth?*, Heinemann, London, 1980. See also, S. Baron et al, *Unpopular Education: Schooling and Social Democracy in England Since 1944*, Hutchinson, CCCS, London, 1987 and Brian Simon, *A Life in Education*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1998.

¹² For instance, there seems to be no mention of it at all in Roy Lowe (ed.), *The Changing Secondary School*, The Falmer Press, Lewes, 1989. These points should not be taken to imply that ‘class’ as a lived reality does not impact as strongly upon society as it always has done. See for instance, Andrew Adonis and Stephen Pollard, *A Class Act: The Myth of Britain’s Classless Society*, Hamish

remarkable for the fact that class was the central issue that impelled enlightened educational reform and practice for over thirty years. The post-war era was one of high-profile surveys such as The Plowden Report (1967) and widely read studies like J. Floud, A.H. Halsey and F.M. Martin's Social Class and Educational Opportunity (1956) or Brian Jackson and Dennis Marsden's Education and the Working Class (1962). This was the time of 'Educational Priority Areas' and the establishment of comprehensive education, its supporters lauding the way 'that in general it undermined privilege and inequality'.¹³ This was a period of sociological attention to the school in which Basil Bernstein revealed that the speech, thought and attainment of working-class children was inhibited by a 'restricted code'. Likewise, psychometric testing, which was approved by the Norwood Committee of 1943 and informed the 1944 Act and the tripartite system of schools, characterised children's minds as belonging to one of three categories: 'abstract', 'mechanical' and 'concrete'.¹⁴

Thus, for the objects of all of this scrutiny, concern and innovation, there were numerous labels and euphemisms for their working-classness. The names by which they were known and by which they knew themselves included: 'the deprived', 'reluctant readers' or 'reluctant learners', 'Newsom kids' (after the report of 1963) and 'the rejected'. There are some profound and suggestive implications about the historical specificity of class as a category here, of how it has been understood, lived, applied and reproduced through policy, pedagogy, technology and

Hamilton, London, 1997, esp. pp. 34-66, on education.

¹³ John Lawson and Harold Silver, A Social History of Education in England, Methuen, London, 1973, p. 440.

¹⁴ For a useful survey of these points see: Ivan Reid, Sociological Perspectives on School and

culture. Historians have certainly paid little attention to the psychology of children and how themselves and others have identified them, as 'working class'. In the context of this 'Aesthetics of Class', this Chapter offers some substantial insights into this area. I will explore the manner in which working-class children were encouraged and authorised to speak in the 'authentic' voice of their working-classness, how that voice was authorised and its authenticity defined, as well as what could be spoken of.

To describe a revolution in education implies a particular view of past practices and assumptions: a tradition. In 1966, HMI George Allen, a founder member of the National Association for the Teaching of English (NATE), reflected upon what tradition had meant in the field of English teaching: 'It used to be assumed that the main business of school was to teach a command of good English and "instill" or "inculcate" a love of literature. "Good English" was equated with impersonal writing; the mother tongue was taught very much as a kind of poor man's Latin, with first the rules, then the application, and with a traditional, so-called correctness'.¹⁵ A similar construction of the 'bad old days' was conveyed by H.L. Elvin, the Director of the London Institute of Education. Hopeful about his distance from such a regime he described its parts at primary level. There were lessons in formal grammar, parsing and parts of speech, with language study separate from any consideration of 'Literature'. Study of the latter would have been limited to material considered suitable for elementary level and the morality of minors. At secondary

Education, Open Books, Shepton Mallet, 1978 and Robin Barrow and Geoffrey Milburn, A Critical Dictionary of Educational Concepts (2nd Edition), Harvester Wheatsheaf, London, 1986.

¹⁵ George Allen interviewed by Robert F. Hogan, 'As Others See Us: An Interview After the Fact', English Journal (National Council of Teachers of English), Vol. 55, May 1966, No. 5, p. 534.

level the teaching of grammar would continue 'in a desperate attempt to show that forms and terms derived from Latin and Greek could be made to fit a very different language'.¹⁶ Literary study here involved more 'mature' authors, although this was material that generally escaped the understanding of those either uninterested or unsuited to the way in which it was taught. Elvin complained that the theory that had directed English language teaching was 'inadequate and sterile', it killed the liveliness and possibilities of language use. Most tellingly, 'It did not even induce in most that correctness which was supposedly its purpose'.¹⁷

Fresh approaches to the teaching of English and educational imperatives in general were authorised by the Education Act of 1944 and the requirements of the extension of educational provision. Despite evaluations questioning the description of the Act as 'a bold, egalitarian measure', in spirit at least, it was accepted that economic and *cultural* deprivation, so-called, was at the root of educational underachievement.¹⁸ The Act acknowledged that children required a 'variety of instruction and training as may be desirable in view of their different ages, abilities and aptitudes'.¹⁹ It established the English Central Advisory Council for Education (CACE England), which generated reports that built upon this idea. 'School and Life' (1947) displayed a concern for the development of the 'whole child', for

¹⁶ H.L. Elvin, 'Forward' in James Britton (General Editor), Talking and Writing: A Handbook for English Teachers, Methuen, London, 1967, p. vii.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Kenneth O. Morgan, The People's Peace, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1990, p. 19. See also, Brian Simon, 'The 1944 Education Act: A Conservative Measure?', History of Education, Vol.15, No.1, March 1986, pp. 31-43.

¹⁹ Quoted in Lawson and Silver, A Social History of Education in England, p. 417. Similar sentiments were expressed in 'Out of School' in the following year while advice that was more overt in its advocacy of free creation and co-operative inventiveness (as opposed to the passive assimilation of 'knowledge') was the Evans/Aaran report from CACE (Wales): 'The Future of Secondary Education in Wales' (1949).

personal development instead of 'mere' vocationalism that was geared towards a life centered on work. An entirely new tone of progressivism was conveyed in its recommendations for improving relations between home and school, suggesting a curriculum that acknowledged the existence of the neighbourhood where children lived, recognising their lives, and indeed, what children themselves brought to the classroom.

Generally, progressive methods offered new opportunities for that working-class majority who did not respond to the rote learning of poetry, succeed in psychometric testing or prosper in the competition for a place at grammar school. Whatever the multitude of sins it was later held to be responsible for, we can enlist Cunningham's suggestive definition of progressivism here as involving a 'reduction in the traditional authoritarianism of the teacher, alternatives to the dominant pedagogical form of the class lesson, removal of harsh punishment and unnecessary drill and discipline, with a preference for self-government by pupils, dissolution of the formal timetable, and a shift in curriculum emphasis from the routine of the 3rs to more *creative and expressive activities*'.²⁰

An example of where these ideas were applied to the teaching of English was in Marjorie Hourd's seminal work of 1949 The Education of the Poetic Spirit.²¹ Of course, books advocating creative work had appeared in Britain before but the publication date of this one was timely: its democratic implications matched the mood of educational legislation and reform.²² Hourd valued work done by *all*

²⁰ Cunningham, Curriculum Change in the Primary School Since 1945, pp. 12-13. My italics.

²¹ Marjorie L. Hourd, The Education of The Poetic Spirit: A Study in Children's Expression in the English Lesson, New Education Book Club, London, 1949.

²² E.g.: Percy Nunn's Education: Its Data and First Principles, (1920); Margaret Macmillan,

children at *all* levels of intelligence and from *all* backgrounds. The differing abilities of children had to be accepted and nurtured, free from the overbearing direction of the teacher. While some appeared to be unsuited to the demands and structures of traditional academic study, *all* were capable of imaginative and creative work. This work would be assessed by aesthetic criteria, evaluated in terms of its personal engagement with a subject and the sincerity of expression. Correctness of grammar, punctuation or adequate vocabulary were considerations *after* the fact of creation. While the intelligent were more able and likely to produce creative works of a higher level of achievement, Hourd insisted that her approach was not in search of 'mute inglorious Miltons', for 'we may quite easily, if linguistic expression is our aim at all costs, be losing to the world a large number of sensitive and happy people. Expressiveness ... is essential to love'.²³

In relation to the post-war history of English teaching, the discussion and dissemination of these ideas can be traced most coherently and consistently through one site in particular - the journal Use of English. David Allen writes that to subscribe to Use of English was to draw on a source of energy and enthusiasm 'sometimes lifted to the level of a crusade'.²⁴ Formerly English in Schools, this journal was founded in 1949 by the Bureau of Current Affairs (BCA). In imitation of the wartime Army-based organisation, the BCA itself was established by the Carnegie trust in order to stimulate a socially conscious education. Use of English was informed by modern linguistics, progressive ideals and practices as well as the

Education Through the Imagination, (1923); Margaret Phillips, Education of the Emotions Through Sentiment Development (1937); Viola Wilhelm, Child Art (1942); Sir H.Read, Education Through Art, (1943) and Marion Richardson, Art and the Child, (1948).

²³ Hourd, The Education of The Poetic Spirit, p. 163.

creative, critical and conscientious approach to literature and life that its editors had been schooled in at Cambridge University under F.R. Leavis. Its editor was Denys Thompson while Boris Ford, David Holbrook, Frank Whitehead and Robin Pedley were amongst its early contributors. The Leavisite ethos they shared was apparent from the outset, in the journal's governing principles and the insistence upon the centrality of English, that 'Its particular value for "use" is that it can create and heighten that critical attitude to our civilization which current affairs teaching should strive after'.²⁵ Later celebrated by Conservative Education Minister Edward Boyle as 'an act of faith ... its standards ... never narrow or partisan', it managed to escape some of the more anti-democratic ideas of its spiritual father.²⁶ In fact, a consideration of Use of English offers some gauge of the considerable spread of the Leavisite vanguard in Britain, and the dissemination and adaptation of his ideas.

The influence of Use of English belied its circulation, which rarely rose above 4000 copies per issue.²⁷ Using its title as a rallying cry, energetic subscribers formed local self-help groups, although each was independent of the journal, as it was careful to underline in any report of their activities.²⁸ LEA grants were available for the establishment of groups and authorities proved generous in circulating

²⁴ Allen, English Teaching Since 1965, p. 1.

²⁵ 'Editorial', Use of English, Vol.1, No.1, Autumn 1949, p. 5.

²⁶ Sir Edward Boyle quoted in 'Twenty-Five', Use of English, Vol.XV, No.4, Summer 1964, p. 243. Famously, Leavis had said that if one were faced with a choice between the end of democracy or the perpetuation of 'The Great Tradition', the minority culture that he was so invested in, then he would have no hesitation in opting for the latter.

²⁷ English in Schools circulated about 400 copies while Use of English averaged 1400 for its first ten years, rising to 4000 in the early 1960s. 'Though readership is very much greater, librarians tell us that the magazine is always in demand', 'Editorial', Use of English, Vol.XV, No.4, Summer 1964, p. 244.

²⁸ In Birmingham the 'Use of English' group was run by Andrew Wilkinson; Frank Whitehead ran one in Sheffield, Quentin Blake was the London contact; in Coventry it was Geoffrey Summerfield with John Gillard Watson and David Holbrook combining in Oxford. Other groups met in Devon, Hampshire, Huddersfield, Kent, Leeds, Lincolnshire, Luton, Penzance, Reading, Somerset,

information and advertisements for them in official bulletins and also in providing meeting places. At meetings teachers exchanged practical advice on creative projects and offered critiques of traditional approaches to grammar. They participated in Leavisite forums on newspapers and 'mass culture', discussed experimental teaching methods and, of course, the appreciation of the 'Great Tradition' of the English literary canon. Activists could be found in local education authorities, universities, teacher training colleges, and of course schools. They founded NATE, forming an immensely productive relationship with its American counterpart the National Council for the Teaching of English (NCTE). In this capacity they offered advice to the great reformist educational reports of the period - most notably 'Newsom' (1963), 'Plowden' (1967) and 'Bullock' (1975).²⁹

One putative standard for Use of English announced that it was 'Written for teachers by teachers'.³⁰ Its pages exhibited hundreds of articles about English teaching - theoretical and practical - in turn generating textbooks and polemics for the attention of anyone seriously interested in English language and culture. These included David Holbrook's English for Maturity (1961) and English for the Rejected (1964), Frank Whitehead's The Disappearing Dais (1966), F.D. Flower's Language and Education (1966) and Peter Abbs', English for Diversity (1969). Highly successful and widely read, books like these advised on good practice,

Southampton, Surrey, Sussex, Taunton, Wells, Weston-Super-Mare, Yeovil and the East Riding.

²⁹ For the originating moment of NATE see: 'Editorial', Use of English, Vol. XV, No 1, Autumn 1963. Denys Thompson invited HMIs, 'Use of English' and regional Association of Teachers of English (ATE) groups to a meeting to consider the formation of a national body funded by publishers Chatto and Windus. An inaugural conference was held in September 1963, opened by the Minister of Education.

³⁰ 'Editorial', Use of English, Vol.XI, No.1, Autumn 1959, p. 3.

demonstrating the work that students were capable of producing.³¹ In their very titles they registered challenges and changes to the nature of the discipline and to the educational imperative. Most important of all was the reconceptualisation of the nature of pupils themselves and the rethinking of their relationship with teachers in the classroom.

If George Sampson in English for the English (1921) had intended to shock his readership with his 'discovery' of the gibbering Morlocks that inhabited the city, Use of English signalled a qualitatively different, reflective and reflexive approach.³² It was acknowledged that teachers needed to confront their own attitudes to their charges and the basis for their often negative assumptions about them. An early review drew attention to the fact that teachers really knew very little about their pupils and about their lives outside of school.³³ In the cities particularly, where children were divorced from nature, they lived amidst drab, overcrowded streets, often in comfortless, unhappy homes. But this environment could no longer be taken to be an index of a moral or intellectual essence. Working-class children formed a body that needed to be properly explored and, to a degree, appreciated on its own terms, locating its cultural strengths as much as bemoaning its weaknesses. As one Editorial of 1951 asked, 'What Do We Do With Them?' The '*Them*' in question were the deprived majority, 'herded from some cultural slum in London, kicking as they

³¹ David Holbrook's English for Maturity sold around 20,000 copies while English for the Rejected did even better. David Holbrook, personal communication with the author, 28 September 1999.

³² See Chapter One, part i.

³³ Elizabeth Taylor, 'Review of Charles S. Segal's "Backward Children in the Making"', Use of English, Vol.2, No.2, Winter 1950, p. 110.

do against school, against one another, and against the ugliness of their environment'.³⁴

This concern was attended by an attempt to explore opportunities for educational reform. Articles in Use of English suggested how children from differing environments might be served by rethinking the nature of the curriculum and conventional approaches to education – what the Editors termed 'The Academic Cage'.³⁵ For English to mean anything at all, it had to connect with the majority, thus it 'must be linked with out-of-school interests - future jobs, the streets outside, the neighbourhood, making things at home and in the workshops ... with these interests as subject matter for both "talk" ... and ... composition'.³⁶

It is a remarkable fact that for all of the years of investment in the ideal of 'Literature', and the championing of 'educated' speech, neither talk nor composition of any kind other than repetitive drill and rigid comprehension found a place on the school curriculum.³⁷ As Allen and Elvin complained, English had too long been assumed to consist of a rigid set of rules guiding the application of language, maintaining a canon of texts whose value and qualities had been determined elsewhere, yet were to be received like the Holy Writ. The advance of a more flexible approach was recognised in the comment of one teacher who later opined that if there was such a thing as a 'New English', it meant 'that we have turned our attention from grammar to *life*'.³⁸

³⁴ 'Editorial', Use of English, Vol.11, No.3, Spring 1951, p. 115.

³⁵ 'Editorial: In the Cage', Use of English, Vol. XIV, No.4, Summer 1963, p. 219.

³⁶ 'Editorial', Use of English, Vol.11, No.3, Spring 1951, p. 115.

³⁷ For official confirmation see: Central Advisory Committee for Education, Children and their Primary Schools: A Report of the Central Advisory Committee for Education ['The Plowden Report'], two vols., London, HMSO, 1967, Vol.1, pp. 218-19.

³⁸ Alasdair Brown, 'Drama in the Primary School: A Sixth Form Project', Use of English, Vol.XXII,

As we have seen in previous chapters, 'life' is a highly charged term, subject to various interpretations. In this instance, whatever the turn to 'life' meant it had something to do with the proliferation of articles advocating 'creative', 'free' or 'personal' writing that responded to and generated innovation in schools in the post-war period. Such was the extent of submissions on this topic that at one point the editors of Use of English requested that readers stop sending in any more articles.³⁹ The status of this new pedagogy was noted by a Leicester Headmistress, who observed that: 'In this country there actually is a branch of English work known officially (on the requisition sheets, etc.) as "Creative Writing". I like the sound of it even if it does tend to have a pompous ring when a seven-year-old announces that "My Creative Writing book's full, miss!"'⁴⁰

The West Riding Education Department signalled official approval of creative methods in 1964 when it published A.B. Cleggs's The Excitement of Writing. Clegg reflected on the fact that this Department, like all others, spent thousands of pounds annually on textbooks expounding traditional methods. He took this opportunity to critique their use and the practice of rote learning, pointless grammatical exercises, and the drills in punctuation and spelling that they advocated and which had consistently failed children. In contrast he presented examples of personal writing which had achieved some success in developing the expression and language of children raised 'in the most dismal environments'.⁴¹ This kind of practice was also authorised for inclusion in examination syllabuses. In 1965 the

No.4, Summer 1972, p. 330. My italics.

³⁹ Anon, 'A Note to Contributors', Use of English, Vol.XIV, No.3, Spring 1963, p. 156. There is also evidence of conferences organised around such work. Herts English Teaching Association advertised one weekend event in 1964, see: Use of English, Vol. XVI, No.2, Winter 1964, p. 108.

West Midlands Board invited schools to formulate courses for the newly established CSE (Certificate of Secondary Education). It encouraged the production of 'descriptive prose, purely personal writing, discussion of personal or social problems, or narrative technique'.⁴²

What exactly did 'creative', 'free' or 'personal' writing entail? For some it was about revealing individuality and developing positive attitudes to ideas such as 'freedom' and most importantly exploring 'experience'.⁴³ An early attempt to delineate evaluative criteria asked 'What is Good Children's Writing?', commending qualities like spontaneity, enthusiasm, sequence, relevance (referring here to the coherence of material), sincerity, originality and imagination.⁴⁴ A further article identified criteria for defining *poor* examples of creative writing that were the fault of 'poor' personalities, those whose work showed no evidence of 'life seeking expression'. It was suggested that 'a person of few enthusiasms, limited perceptions and narrow interest cannot write well, for he has nothing to say'.⁴⁵ To describe the

⁴⁰ Doris Hildick, 'Primary School Notes', Use of English, Vol. IX, No.3, Spring 1958, p. 168.

⁴¹ Reported in Anon, 'The Excitement of Writing', Use of English, Vol. XV, No.4, p. 245.

⁴² (CSE exams began in 1965) West Midlands Examinations Board, Certificate of Secondary Education: 1965, (Cyclostyled Syllabus). Birmingham, 1964, no page. See also John Dixon, Criteria of Success in English: A Critical Survey of C.S.E. English Syllabuses and Specimen Papers, NATE, London, 1966. 'The idea of drawing on personal knowledge, interests and experience, or of stimulating the imagination and prompting vivid and vigorous expression is explicit in almost all syllabuses', p. 5.

⁴³ For instance, M.K. Paffard, 'Free Writing: II', Use of English, Vol.IX, No.3, Spring 1958, p. 183-9.

⁴⁴ Anon, 'What is Good Children's Writing? (A Report on Some Representative Work Sent from Nine Primary Schools in Different Parts of England and Scotland)', Use of English, Vol.IV, No 2, Winter, 1952, pp. 66-75.

⁴⁵ Frances Stevens, 'What is Good Children's Writing? Part II', Use of English, Vol.IV, No.3, Spring 1953, p. 128. Steedman is incorrect in suggesting that The Plowden Report gave the practice of free writing 'unqualified' support. While it advocated the continued dissemination of new methods it advised caution. The essence of personal writing 'is that much of it is ... communicating something that has ... engaged their minds and their imaginations ... It is always natural and real and sometimes has qualities which make it most moving to read'. It was suggested that any attempt at inventive fiction was best left to the 'exceptional child' with a 'proper' gift for storytelling. 'The Plowden Report', Vol.1, para. 603, p. 219.

character of children as either 'poor' and 'rich' seems an unfortunate turn of phrase; after all, what opportunity was there for encouraging growth in such a person? Indeed who defined the criteria for deciding on this version of poverty?

More generally in articles advocating creative writing it was not the event that children wrote about that defined achievement, but *how* they wrote.⁴⁶ What *always* mattered was the individual's perspective, his or her sincerely felt response, creatively expressed. Thus, progressives revealed their Romantic roots in the focus on spontaneity and effect over formal rectitude, echoing William Hazlitt's dictum that 'passion speaks truer than reason'. For instance, in her advice to the Plowden Committee, Sybil Marshall recommended that: 'Wide and varied experience, stories, rhymes and extensive dramatic play stimulate fluent writing, and the desire to have one's written work understood by others is the best stimulus to correct spelling and punctuation'.⁴⁷ Likewise, for Peter Abbs creative writing was something 'opposed to "formal" work which aims at solely getting the externals, like punctuation and spelling right'. While creative writing was not indifferent to such matters, they were trivial: 'The impetus of writing should lie beyond externals, in the heart and imagination of the child'.⁴⁸

Nonetheless, as one correspondent to Use of English observed, there was something rather nebulous about the rhetoric of creativity. The proliferation of series like A.W. Rowe and Peter Summers' English Through Experience (1963) evinced an unreflexive deployment of words such as the ubiquitous 'experience', 'imagination',

⁴⁶ E.g., in J.H. Walsh, 'Writing about "Experiences"', Use of English, Vol.XVI, No.2, Winter 1964, p. 91.

⁴⁷ 'Sybil Marshall, 'Memo to Plowden', Use of English, Vol. XVI, No.1, Autumn 1964, p. 5.

⁴⁸ Peter Abbs, English for Diversity: A Polemic, Heinemann, London, 1969, p. 51.

'creative', 'explore' and 'organic'.⁴⁹ The complainant protested that: 'I am not sure that the authors really know good language from bad; real experience from sham; life from letters'.⁵⁰ Whatever such vaguely enlisted terminology implied or how it was understood, he suggested that it had little to do with *real* life. Yet elsewhere, teachers dealing with creative projects attempted to define more specific aims, exploring what 'experience' entailed without recourse to abstract and existential rhetoric.

Some teachers bemoaned the limited stimuli and 'stock topics' that were often used in creative writing classes. These included 'the story of a penny', adventures of various sorts and visits to haunted houses - fantasies that seemed lazily (and harmfully) derivative of mass media fictions. These resulted in limited work. The *best* sort of composition was that 'which gives children a chance to make use of certain of their own experience - experiences ordinary enough to be readily called to mind, but deriving a significance from the childhood emotions which usually accompany them'.⁵¹ In this way, teachers Harold Rosen and Nancy Martin sought to address the problem of eliciting 'authentic' writing from pupils, avoiding the clichés of journalism, advertising, comics or other poor literary material. Subjects that avoided the temptations of 'slick, shoddy language', and stock situations were to be found in the world that was familiar to boys yet *unavailable* in their reading. In

⁴⁹ An advert for this series from publishers Blond Educational claimed that it has been taken up by no less than 1395 schools. Use of English, Vol.XVI, No.3, Spring 1965, p. 2.

⁵⁰ Michael Tucker, 'Correspondence: Second Thoughts', Use of English, Vol.VXI, No.2, Winter 1964, p. 145.

⁵¹ J.H. Walsh, 'Composition in the Modern School', Use of English, Vol.IV, No.3, Spring 1953, p. 159. Also, J.H. Walsh, 'Writing about 'Experiences''; J.W. Creber, Current Trends in English Teaching: The Quest for Rigour', English in Education, No.1, Vol.1, Spring 1967, p. 19. Creber's contribution to the corpus of books on educational practice includes, Lost for Words : Language and Educational Failure, Penguin in association with NATE, Harmondsworth, 1972.

response to the question of 'What Shall I Set?', they recommended that teachers: 'Keep sending them home - to mum, to dad, to the family; at meals, quarreling, having a laugh, getting up, going out, buying something'. What this approach meant was offering the child the opportunity of contemplating 'a situation, rich in first-hand feeling, charged with association and personal relationships, alive with people they know extraordinarily well, down to the last foible'.

The home was merely the starting point for work that would 'branch out into other autobiographical material, friends, the district, and school'.⁵² However, in order to facilitate this exploration and to produce authentic writing, the child's authentic *voice* needed to be accepted. They advised that any approach, must avoid the 'set of approved views', the 'unknown censor'. Young authors needed to be liberated from an authority that shook their confidence, that made the child's tone wobble as 'he goes as poker faced as a barrow-boy being chivvied by a policeman, or defiantly facetious, or clumsily iconoclastic'.⁵³ To underwrite the confidence needed for expression, the child's world needed acceptance too, as well as all of those things that hitherto, they had been told to *avoid* in class: 'they'll take some convincing that very homely material is implied by the subject, that there really is something to write about, that they are not exposing themselves to mockery and ridicule when the whole point of a family incident turns on the fact that they all

⁵² Harold Rosen and Nancy Martin, 'What Shall I Set?', *Use of English*, Vol.X, No. 2, Winter 1958, p. 92. Steedman gives an account of Valerie Avery's autobiographical book *London Morning*, first published in 1964. This was a product of activities in her English class at Walworth High School in the 1950s. Her teacher was Harold Rosen. See: Steedman, 'State-Sponsored Autobiography', pp. 50-1. Rosen was a CPGB member, for an account from his son Michael Rosen, see 'All in the Family' in Phil Cohen, *Children of the Revolution: Communist Childhood in Cold War Britain*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1997, pp. 52-65.

⁵³ Rosen and Martin, 'What Shall I Set?', p. 92.

have to wash at the kitchen sink, there has to be real confidence in a boy that his material is acceptable'.⁵⁴

These ideas were a logical development of progressive ideals and the ethos of Use of English, registering the challenge to the guiding assumptions of English teaching and the limited domain of English. This challenge was voiced in similar journal articles and in the proliferating series of books on the subject of creative writing. Any approach to the subject usually required that the teacher confront his or her own literary preferences and social prejudices. Thereafter, children themselves needed convincing of the validity of their 'dun-coloured experiences'.⁵⁵ Of course, this benefited the teacher who sought to know more about the world of children and install it as a welcome topic in the class. The objective was to 'release and bring to the surface all the locked-up information about themselves and their lives which they have not thought suitable for work in school'.⁵⁶ One teacher proposed a maxim so familiar to contemporary creative writing groups that the best writers *stick to what they know*. It was suggested that any stories produced by children 'should have a local setting - the pupils' own town or village - even the locality of their school, and should include a lot of real-life detail and "local colour" ... If these conditions are observed ... it will remain original ... likely to remain rooted in real-life'.⁵⁷ T.W.

⁵⁴ Rosen and Martin, 'What Shall I Set?', p. 94. See also Harold Rosen 'Progress in Composition in the 'O' Level Year: Some Disturbing Evidence', Use of English, Vol. XVIII, No.4, p. 7. An invitation in some G.C.E. examinations was to write about 'Myself at 10 or myself at 20 ... an occasion when you were with friends and something happened which alarmed you ... Relatives ... Your neighbourhood, past, present and future'.

⁵⁵ M. Brooke Gwynne and P. Gurrey, 'Exploring Writing at the Secondary Level' in James Britton (General Editor), Talking and Writing: A Handbook for English Teachers, Methuen, London, 1967, p. 48.

⁵⁶ Brooke Gwynne and Gurrey, 'Exploring Writing at the Secondary Level', p. 47.

⁵⁷ J.R. Osgerby, 'Useful Lessons: XIX, A Class Serial', Use of English, Vol. XII, No.1, Autumn 1960, p. 140.

Haggitt, a teacher at Wychall Farm Junior School in Birmingham, made similar claims for the inspiration of the everyday in producing good writing. While some teachers sought stimuli in countryside jaunts or in visits to unusual locations he suggested instead that the teacher 'Let the children observe their own environment closely and encourage them to talk about what they see'.⁵⁸ His book included his pupils reflections on the Birmingham Housing Estate where they lived. Maudlin in tone, 'Julie' wrote:

Sad depressing air strangles the grey houses forming a barrier of forlornness against the tall stone walls smoke curls round the figures of a forgotten hopscotch. Papers lie scattered about on the pavement the eternal throb of gas lamps fill the air. The stale smells of beer, mingles with the chip papers and everywhere the lifting of the gloom and mist brings to light the dull street ... and once again the sun shines out behind a hurrying cloud.⁵⁹

As with writing, 'talk' was something that had not been a traditional feature of the English curriculum, a fact that had been a long-standing cause for concern.⁶⁰ And like creative writing, it appeared as an allotted space on post-war timetables, the object of examination syllabuses and as the subject of a wealth of articles and books.⁶¹ Speech had been treated as secondary to the written word, but now its status as a central component of English teaching was recognised officially by The

⁵⁸ T.W. Haggitt, Working with Language, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1969 (first published 1967) p. 21.

⁵⁹ 'Julie' in Haggitt, Working with Language, p. 21.

⁶⁰ Recommendations for a more enlightened approach to English teaching in relation to oral skills were voiced in: The Board of Education. 'Circular 753', The Teaching of English in Secondary Schools (1910); The Teaching of English in England (1921); 'The Hadow Report', The Primary School (1931) and latterly 'The Norwood Report', Curriculum and Examinations in Secondary Schools (1943). All argued that something should be done about speech with varying prejudices and prescriptions but with little practical advice.

⁶¹ An early article on the subject was Wilson Fry's 'Getting them Talking', Use of English, Vol. V.

Newsom Report (1963). It announced that the overriding aim of English teaching concerned the personal development and social competence of the child, determining that speech had 'by far the most significant contribution to make towards that development'.⁶² And the progressive ethos impacted upon language too. As one writer complained, much of the writing about experience elicited from pupils often had little relation to *their* speech, *their* familiar modes of expression.⁶³

Undoubtedly, Use of English was *the* site for the expression of new ideas and liberal values in the teaching of English, yet it would be wrong to imply that it registered a complete paradigm shift in this area. Particularly in relation to language, older methods of teaching English endured in practice and as part of 'common-sense' notions about speech. Noting the slow progress in English teaching in 1954, a pamphlet issued by the Ministry of Education bemoaned the effect of 'remedies proposed in letters to the press and to the heads of schools'. Their advice to reinforce traditional methods in order to halt cultural decline (the standard of English has *always* been in decline) was not supported by experience, and any return to the past was 'believed by many teachers of English to be among the likeliest ways of making things worse'.⁶⁴ Nonetheless, traditional ideas and practices were well represented in the pages of Use of English, despite the disapproving tones of the editors.

Most revealing were the numerous advertisements for courses offering speech therapy as well as those for traditional grammar and comprehension

No. 4., Summer 1954.

⁶² Ministry of Education. Half our Future: A Report of the Central Advisory Council for Education (England) ('The Newsom Report'), HMSO, London, 1963, para.467, p. 153.

⁶³ Keith Pledger, 'Creative Writing and Personality', Use of English, Vol. XVI, No.2, Winter 1964.

⁶⁴ Ministry of Education, Language: Some Suggestions for Teachers of English and Others in Primary and Secondary Schools and in Further Education (Ministry of Education, Pamphlet No.26), HMSO, London, 1961 (first published 1954), p. 44.

textbooks. Abiding social prejudices and the myth of a qualitative hierarchy of value in accent and dialect were constantly reiterated in journal articles. In one instance a writer who advised on speech training advocated rigorous jaw, lip and tongue exercises for pupils, while another advised on 'proper' diction.⁶⁵ A Loughton teacher expounded on these ideas in an ethnography of 'Secondary Modern Speech'. His charges, 'one generation away from the London streets', were now at home in 'the clean uniformity of a council estate'.⁶⁶ They had brought with them some inherited and unwelcome habits including glottal stops and an avoidance of aspirates. Tape recorders were used in speech exercises and drama classes in order that pupils might become self-reflexive (and self-conscious) about their faulty linguistic habits, that living on their estate and their speech identified them as 'common': 'a real Cockney epithet for anyone who is sluttish, flirtatious or poor'.⁶⁷

In this vein, the inexorable spread of Standard English was championed on the basis that it was *superior* to any other accent, which one could be 'cured' of. Language was thought to be subject to evolutionary processes. 'Good speech' was preserved and disseminated by educationalists, the BBC and by the great dramatists, while it was inevitable that some varieties were to 'fall by the wayside' – i.e. all other dialects and accents.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ J.S. Nicholson, 'The English Syllabus of a Primary School', Use of English, Vol.V, No.1, Autumn 1953, pp. 23-29 and R.A. Auty, 'A Note on the Pronunciation of Common Words', Use of English, Vol.X, No.4, Summer 1959, pp. 250-1.

⁶⁶ P.W.R. Foot, 'Secondary Modern Speech', Use of English, Vol. XIV, No.3, Spring 1963, p. 153..

⁶⁷ Ibid. p. 155. This use of recordings for corrective purposes is an interesting counterpoint to the work of Charles Parker, George Ewart Evans, Clive Barker, Peter Cheeseman and others who advocated the use of tape-recorders in more positive pursuit of accents, dialects and oral testimonies. Other sources suggest a more sympathetic use of technology. Children were sent out to record dialogue and stories, to reflect upon their own reading and dialogue. E.g.: Simon Clements, 'Talk in the Secondary School' in James Britton (General Editor), Talking and Writing: A Handbook for English Teachers, Methuen, London, 1967, p. 41.

⁶⁸ Prudence Hill, 'English Speech Today', Use of English, Vol.IV, No.3, Spring 1953, p. 135.

There were many who found these ideas objectionable and insupportable, leading to what Edward Blishen described as a stand-off between 'die-hard grammarians' and 'intolerable revolutionaries'.⁶⁹ He wrote of a need for a cultural reconciliation, that 'the gulf between educated English and the tongue spoken and written by the mass of our people is a deep one; and I am not sure that we shall not have to confess that the two tongues must learn from each other, instead of living chillily separate existences'.⁷⁰ Reconciliation was implicit in the relativist ideas of modern linguistics and its conjunction with the democratic ethos of progressivism. One of those who would have been labelled as a 'revolutionary' was Frank Whitehead. He described how traditional thinking was connected with the abiding myth of a cultural and linguistic 'Golden Age', that there was once a superior, correct pattern of English after which most developments had been but a corruption. The 'Canute-like resistance' to change of some the English teachers meant attempting to fit kids to a prescriptive mold.⁷¹ He suggested that any account of grammar could only be *descriptive*, that it 'could have nothing to say to about what was or was not "correct", for every dialect, every local or class language, had its own distinctive grammar just as Standard English has'.⁷² This is not to say that he disposed of some

⁶⁹ Edward Blishen, 'English in the Modern School', *Use of English*, Vol.X, No.4, Summer 1959, p. 219. Blishen was the author of *The Roaring Boys* (1955), an account of his experience as a teacher in a 'sink school', once a feature of the secondary modern sector.

⁷⁰ Edward Blishen, 'English in the Modern School' in *Use of English*, Vol.X, No.4, Summer 1959, p. 224. Eileen Haggitt, 'The Teacher's Role and the Teaching of Language' in *English in Education (Principle and Practice -2)* Vol.5, No.1, Spring 1971, p. 49.

⁷¹ The problem had roots in nineteenth century linguistics which proposed that words and languages were a set of classifiable facts, objects identifiable and amenable to study at a *remove* from usage. This was also related to the Ciceronian ideal of Latin. These traditions survived in the favouring of writing over speech the flexibility of which was often dismissed as 'only colloquial'.

⁷² Whitehead. 'English Teaching and Modern Linguistics', p. 7. Many articles advocating more enlightened approaches, decrying the boredom and dead-end of grammar did appear in *Use of English*, see: A.A. Evans, 'Grammar, Language and Style:II', *Use of English*, Vol.V, No.2, Winter 1953; Hunter Diack, 'A Re-Examination of Grammar', *Use of English*, Vol.VII, No.2, Winter 1955;

idea of acceptable or communally agreed upon usage. Yet this was merely pragmatic, judgements about language were not linguistic but social in origin, no way of speaking was innately more efficient or aesthetically pleasing than another. Whitehead argued that, if accepted, such reason would 'make a difference to the *tone* of many of our references to pupils' "errors".⁷³

There was official support for enlightened approaches to language teaching. The Newsom Report noted that a child's speech was 'not essentially a matter of accent or pronunciation ... far more important is the need to ensure that they can speak easily, clearly and with interest, and have something to talk about'.⁷⁴ In its evidence to the Plowden Committee, the teachers of NATE stressed that children's work in this area should be based on their own experience and interests, that 'clear, lively speech, rather than "Standard English", was the aim'.⁷⁵

'Oracy' was one name given to a pedagogy of talk, the subject of a landmark conference held at the University of Birmingham in Easter 1965.⁷⁶ It was here that Charles Parker held forth on the *superiority* of vernacular speech, and while not every one was in sympathy with his inverted prejudice, there were many who were

Susie Tucker, 'Grammar -Still a Problem', Use of English, Vol. X, No.2, Winter 1958; C.D. Poster, 'The Case Against Grammar', Use of English, Vol. XI, No.2, Winter 1959; A.R. Tomkins, 'The Use of English Paper', Use of English, Vol.XIII, No.2, Winter 1961 and 'S.L', 'Examiners Note Experts: A Survey of English Language Papers', Use of English, Vol XV, No.2, Winter 1963. As evinced in the last two titles and in many editorials, examinations were considered detrimental to the teaching of English, effecting a 'backwash effect' whereby the child was tutored in a two-dimensional fashion to produce material solely for the satisfaction of the 'Board'. Such work did little for spontaneity, authenticity, and quality of expression.

⁷³ Whitehead. 'English Teaching and Modern Linguistics', p. 8.

⁷⁴ 'The Newsom Report', para.467, p. 153.

⁷⁵ NATE. English in the Primary School: Evidence Presented to the Plowden Committee, NATE, Caversham, Reading, July 1964, p. 28.

⁷⁶ For an early account of Oracy see, Dorothy Atkinson, Alan Davies and Andrew Wilkinson 'The Testing of Listening Comprehension for C.S.E.', Use of English, Volume XVI. No 1, Autumn 1964. See also: N.A.T.E. Bulletin: Some Aspects of Oracy, Vol.II, No.2, Summer 1965.

prepared to accept that it was at least as equally valid as RP or 'Standard English'.⁷⁷ Supporting this position was keynote speaker Andrew Wilkinson. An important figure in the development of Oracy, he was a founder member of NATE, chair of a local 'Use of English' group while a master at a Birmingham comprehensive, later lecturer in the University's Department of Education. In his address, he condemned as shameful the neglect of a vibrant oral culture, how children spoke and what they spoke about. Advocating that language work should be based upon precepts of creativity, rather than the *repetition* of the ideas and words of others, he stated that: 'acceptance of the concept of Oracy implies a reorientation in our educational practice which in places will need to be drastic. The key word in our school disciplinary system has been "Shut up!"; we have been obeyed only too well'.⁷⁸

If not "Shut up!" teaching had meant the constant denigration and correction of kids when they did open their mouths. Outlining what this meant in practice, one headmaster at the conference offered 'A Syllabus of Speech and Drama' which was based on work developed at Sheldon Heath Comprehensive School in Birmingham. As with creative writing programmes, the first stage of his approach to Oracy concerned the teacher, who must be cleared of all 'the old prejudices' about speech and of the language and lives of the children themselves. Of course, the aim was to facilitate confidence in the child and a command of the spoken word, 'And the starting point for this is the language he already uses, brought freely and

⁷⁷ Parker, in 'Spoken Language As We Find It', expounded on his work and theories to the assembled progressives, offering an indictment of 'educated speech' as *inferior* when compared to vernacular speech. This elicited a reply from M.A.K. Halliday in 'Speech and Situation' in which he revealed his sympathy and fundamental disagreement. N.A.T.E. Bulletin: Some Aspects of Oracy, Vol.II, No.2, Summer 1965.

⁷⁸ Andrew Wilkinson, 'Some Aspects of Oracy', N.A.T.E. Bulletin: Some Aspects of Oracy, Vol.II, No.2, Summer, 1965, p. 4.

uninhibitedly into the classroom. Talk, talk, talk, by the children ... that's the beginning'.⁷⁹ Elsewhere, H.L. Elvin outlined the liberating effects of this approach, arguing that modern linguistic theory afforded the child creative *agency*, as opposed to interpolation by language and structure imposed from without.⁸⁰

As with creative writing, these attitudes were disseminated in textbooks that suggested interesting ideas for exploring language and validating children's speech. As Whitehead argued, the reappraisal of the language of children 'would have in fact something of the character of a rudimentary sociological enquiry'.⁸¹ In his widely used book Topics in English for the Secondary School (1965), Geoffrey Summerfield suggested that teachers 'learn to take an interest in children's delight in such linguistic *jeux d'esprit* as back-slang, jargon, private languages, modish cant, dialect and rhyme ... the creation of a new private language, the exploration of nicknames, or the compilation of a dialect dictionary based on the extra-curricular vocabulary of our pupils and the speech of their parents'.⁸² Similarly, Simon Clements celebrated the 'great individual beauty and richness' of local dialects.⁸³ He recommended the work of Charles Parker as a model for language exercises, that pupils 'might find themselves doing a scheme of work that leads to interviewing old people or factory workers; and such situations provide material for evaluative and critical talk - for which most children have very little opportunity'.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ John Dalton, 'A Syllabus of Speech and Drama', N.A.T.E. Bulletin: Some Aspects of Oracy, Vol.II, No.2, Summer 1965, p. 32.

⁸⁰ Elvin, in Britton (ed.), Talking and Writing, p. ix.

⁸¹ Whitehead, 'English Teaching and Modern Linguistics', p. 8.

⁸² Geoffrey Summerfield, Topics in English for the Secondary School, B.T.Batsford, London, 1965, pp. 30-1.

⁸³ Simon Clements, 'Talk in the Secondary School' in Britton (ed.), Talking and Writing, p. 37.

⁸⁴ Clements, 'Talk in the Secondary School', p. 39. Language work sometimes merged with literary study as models for class work. Dylan Thomas' Under Milk Wood is a title often cited in articles, as

Thus, the great innovation of creative approaches to writing and speech lay in the acceptance of the appurtenances of the individual child and, explicitly or implicitly, the wider culture that he or she brought to the classroom. Accounting for the kind of material kids were now authorised to produce in writing classes, a Sheffield teacher located its roots in Modernist works of the 1920s and 1930s. He concluded that 'Children are being ... taught informally to accept and imitate the unheroic subjects and extempore style of the new men their teachers have accepted'.⁸⁵ Others found more immediate inspiration in the corpus of working-class realist writing of the post-war years. This was that extraordinary proliferation of cultural work concerning working-class experience in novels, films, drama, music and poetry, but extending also to the sociology of Wilmott and Young's Family and Kinship in East London (1957), Jackson and Marsden's Education and the Working Class (1962), and of course Richard Hoggart's The Uses of Literacy (1957).

Alongside other 'working-class' texts, The Uses of Literacy was distributed in schoolrooms as material that was felt to be particularly suitable *for* working-class children. A review in Use of English suggested that this book in particular could aid creative work. If the majority of working-class children were felt to be unacquainted with literature and literary models, it was in part due to a lack of recognition of their world and ways *in* books and in the language of books: 'the mores by which they are pervaded, strike the children at first as alien, and the relationship assumed between

is Charles Parker's work. E.g see: Sheila Mackenzie 'Claudia Street - A Play for Voices', Use of English, Vol.XVIII, No 4; K.Walsh, 'The School Play Now', English in Education (Principle and Practice - 2), Vol.5, No1. Spring 1971.

⁸⁵ S.Cook, 'How Free is Free Writing?', Use of English, Vol XVI, No.1, Autumn 1964. However, on this point we should note Virginia Woolf's comment that 'We are nauseated by the sight of trivial personalities decomposing in the eternity of print', 'The Modern Essay', in The Essays of Virginia Woolf, Vol.IV, The Hogarth Press, London, 1994, p.221.

author and reader is often of both adults and gentlemen'.⁸⁶ Similarly, the Schools Council suggested that literature that spoke 'with the voices of distant generations or alien cultures' could baffle the 'reluctant reader': 'What he needs first are voices he can recognise on familiar themes'.⁸⁷ Work such as Hoggart's demonstrated the way in which writing could deal with ordinary lives. It would in turn generate useful, if imitative, practice with implications (as always) for the teacher: 'children must be encouraged from the very first to speak and write frankly out of their own experience, and helped to see that literature is the work of men and women writing about what they know ... It follows that teachers must learn - and it is not easy - how to accept children's experience'.⁸⁸

Guides to creative writing that suggested the 'story of a penny' were supplemented by others utilising material thought more 'relevant' to working-class life; the pages of Use of English accommodating a sizeable number of adverts and reviews for such items.⁸⁹ For instance, Conflict (1969) was the title of a series developed by Geoffrey Hacker, James Learman, and Rony Robinson at Eltham Green School in London.⁹⁰ Aimed at children aged 14 and upward, it encouraged close attention to societal problems, prompting discussion of 'issues' like class, race and war, and arguments for (and against) the Welfare State. This was organised

⁸⁶ D.W. Preen, 'Using Familiar Forms of Fiction' I: Serial Story', Use of English, Vol.XV, No.1, Autumn 1963, p. 28.

⁸⁷ Schools Council. An Approach Through English, Humanities for the Young School Leaver, HMSO, London, 1968, p. 8.

⁸⁸ Frances Stevens, 'The Uses of Literacy and The Use of English', Use of English, Vol.IX, No. 4, Summer 1958, p. 232.

⁸⁹ See: 'F.C.', 'Review of J Charlesworth, The Living Language: An Approach to General Studies, Chatto and Windus', Use of English, Vol.VXII, No.2, Winter 1965, p. 160. The most famous (or notorious) of these was Reflections by Simon Clements, John Dixon and Leslie Stratta. See W.T. Spouge, 'Review of "Reflections"', Use of English, Vol.VXI, No.3, Spring 1965, which suggested that this collection, while serious, was humourless and depressing.

⁹⁰ Geoffrey Hacker, James Learman, Rony Robinson, Conflict:1, Nelson, London, 1973 (fifth edition)

around extracts from the work of authors like Alan Sillitoe, Lynne Reid Banks, John Lennon, Walter Greenwood, Arnold Wesker, Stan Barstow, Laurie Lee, John Braine, David Storey, Keith Waterhouse, as well as quotations from 'The Newsom Report' and a play about comprehensive schools by Barry Reckard, entitled Skyvers. Also included were traditional folk songs and D.H. Lawrence's poem 'How Beastly the Bourgeois Is', alongside an instructive extract from Lady Chatterley's Lover detailing an early meeting of Connie and Mellors in which she finds his accent confusing.⁹¹ Again and again, this list of authors figures in collections from the period and on the reading list of examination boards. The flexibility of CSE courses in particular meant that schools were able to taper syllabuses to local character and the perceived needs of their children.⁹² Of equal importance to collections like Conflict was the inclusion of the efforts of pupils themselves, a way of

Originally published 1969.

⁹¹ 'Despite his limitations, teachers often turn to Lawrence, the one outstanding writer this century to come from a working class home'. Schools Council, An Approach Through English, Humanities for the Young School Leaver, HMSO, London, 1968, p. 8.

⁹² E.g., R.H. Poole 'Contemporary English', in Use of English, Vol. 20, No. 4, Summer 1969, p. 307. The East Midland Regional Examinations Boards accepted the 'Ashfield School Syllabus for Contemporary English: a course in Life, Literature and the Art of Writing'. Its included insights into: 'How contemporary life is revealed in Literature'; 'Literature as the Art of Writing' and 'Creative Writing'. It recommended the use of various modern anthologies and particular texts based around themes such as 'The Responsible Society', 'Parents and Children', 'War', 'Age', 'Status', 'Home life'. Relevant works include John Arden's Live Like Pigs and Happy Haven, Orwell's A Hanging, Alan Sillitoe's collection The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner, Stan Barstow's A Kind of Loving, James Kirkup's The Only Child, Keith Waterhouse's Billy Liar, Willmott and Young's Family and Kinship in East London and Family and Class in a London Suburb and various works by the ubiquitous Lawrence. See also Alfred Rowe and Peter Emmens, English Through Experience, Hart-Davis Educational, St Albans, 1974 (originally published by Blond Educational in 1963 this was reprinted several times); G.R. Halson, Comprehension, Interpretation and Criticism: Stage 1, Longmans, London, 1963 (three parts, running into several reprints). This included Laurie Lee, John Steinbeck, John Moore, Wolf Mankowitz, (A Kid for Two Farthings), J.B. Priestley (An English Journey), Keith Waterhouse (There is a Happy Land), Lawrence, Hoggart (Uses of Literacy) and Clancy Sigal (Weekend in Dinlock).

demonstrating the possibilities of personal writing, valuing the everyday and individual creativity.⁹³

The practice of putting the working-class corpus before working-class kids as an aid to writing reflected back on the rather limited character of what had passed for the literary canon, the Leavisite 'Great Tradition'. The need for 'relevant' material for instance, suggested that the study of literature needed to be extended beyond the 'examinable ration' of canonic texts which served to inhibit the pupil's impression of literature and its possibilities.⁹⁴ There was also a corresponding call for juvenile literature written specifically *for* working-class children. As early as 1948 in his Tales out Of School popular children's author (and former CPGB member) Geoffrey Trease argued for books that showed greater realism and a fidelity to ordinary life.⁹⁵ This was a concern also for a conference of 1956 held in Westminster by an organisation called the 'Comics Campaign Council'. At 'From Comics to Classics', teachers, publishers and book traders debated the nature of children's reading material. It was suggested that too much of what was available of quality was overtly 'middle-class' in tone and concern. The worrying consumption

⁹³ And When You Are Young, Prose and Verse by Young Writers, 15-18 (1960), an anthology collected by the London Association of Teachers of English (LATE), was itself designed as a textbook to be brought in sets and used in creative writing classes. London Association of Teachers of English (LATE), And When You Are Young, Prose and Verse by Young Writers, 15-18, Joint Council for Education Through Art, 1960.

⁹⁴ E.g., T.F. Norris, "'O'Level English Literature', Use of English, Vol.XIV, No.2, Winter 1962; Jennifer Rogers, 'Choosing Modern Plays', Use of English, Vol.XVI, No.2, Winter 1964; T.R. Barnes, 'Reading for the Sixth Form: Drama', Use of English, Vol.XVII, No.1, Autumn 1966. The last article suggested using modern plays in the classroom such as the ubiquitous Roots. On this subject see also Michael Marland, 'Play Reading in the Middle School', Use of English, Vol. XVIII, No.2, Winter 1966.

⁹⁵ Geoffrey Trease, Tales Out of School, William Heinemann, London et al, 1948. Andy Croft mentions Trease's political commitment and allegiances in the inter-war years, citing his 'fiercely pro-Communist children's books' Bows Against the Barons (1934) and Comrades for the Charter (1934) and Missing from Home (1937). He later denied any connection with the party and its ideology. See: Andy Croft, 'The Boys Round the Corner: the Story of Fore Publications' in Andy Croft (ed.), A

of pulp material, although universally disapproved of, was understandable in this light due its perceived 'relevance' in terms of its gritty language, urban milieu and its availability.⁹⁶ Reporting in Use of English E.W. Hildick outlined the conclusions of the conference, commenting that those in attendance 'spoke from experience, knowing that while class divisions are no longer so economically and politically sharp as they were pre-war, socially and culturally they are still most pronounced'.⁹⁷ In children's literature this division was apparent in the preponderance of 'darling-drawling mothers, business-tripping fathers, prep schools, old nannies and weekend cottages'. For Hildick's own pupils this 'represented another world, a fiction beyond fiction, which they just couldn't accept'.⁹⁸ The Plowden Report also recognised this as a problem, noting the over-representation of middle-class life and culture (and by implication its values) in the text and illustrations of works aimed at children. For the Times Literary Supplement the middle-class world portrayed in books was a throwback to the Twenties, one 'endlessly juxtaposed with the postman, farmer and gardener'.⁹⁹

The response to this imbalance was manifest in the appearance of a prodigious number of books and reading schemes dedicated to portraying working-class life in order to appeal to working-class children directly.¹⁰⁰ Hildick himself

Weapon in the Struggle: the Cultural History of the Communist party in Britain, Pluto, London, 1998.

⁹⁶ See: Comics Campaign Council, 'From Comics to Classics: Report on a Conference Which Was Held on Saturday November 3rd at Church house, Westminster, London, 1956, p. 14.

⁹⁷ E.W. Hildick, 'Secondary Modern Fiction' in Use of English, Vol. X, No. 3, Spring 1959, p. 188.

⁹⁸ Ibid. p. 187.

⁹⁹ Anon, 'Going it Alone', Times Literary Supplement, No. 3501, 3rd April 1969, p. 359.

¹⁰⁰ A basic reading scheme might include a main sequence of books supported and supplemented by other material and apparatus, such as pre-readers, work books, games, matching activities, pictures etc. See: 'Introduction' in Remedial Teaching Services. Graded Book List, City of Birmingham Education Department, Birmingham Arts Publications, no date but updates a list of 1970, no page. These schemes included Beacon (1957), Happy Trio (1961) Happy Venture (1959) Let's Learn to Read (1960). McKee Reading Scheme (1955), Racing to Read, (Arnold, 1962), Royal Road Readers

contributed the 'Jim Starling' series of books, which were set in a town with the unlikely name of 'Smogbury'. Macmillan published a substantial series 'especially for children in ordinary homes' under the umbrella title of 'Nippers'. These were edited by Leila Berg, which were written by her and other popular authors and illustrated by well-known artists.¹⁰¹ In a brief sent out to potential authors in February 1967, she asked:

What proportion of the readers of the primary school books actually do have gardens and lawn-mowers? ... or sit down to a leisurely breakfast with both Mum and Dad? What is it like when "children" in some mysterious way does not include you? ... Our whole society is any case depersonalizing these children. They have never had the calm, the cherishing, the respect, the books and pictures and music, the talk and the discussions and the reading aloud that have helped other children's confident identity to grow. And even in the books they get in school, which are often the only books they handle, they see no recognition, no reflection of themselves, nothing that tells them they belong in this world; they grow up feeling they have no right to exist.¹⁰²

Concerns like these also ushered in an era of increasing sensitivity about the nature of children's reading and the surveillance of material directed at them. For example, West Bromwich Education Committee offered a classification and assessment of a variety of books produced in this expanding market. They were identified for the way in which they exhibited a 'middle class background and

(1954, revised 1970), Step Up and Read (1965), Through the Rainbow (1965) - which featured 'everyday children's speech' and Time for Reading (1967).

¹⁰¹ E.g.: Leila Berg, A Day Out, Finding a Key, The Jumble Sale, Fish and Chips For Supper, Jimmy's Story, Lesley's Story; Richard Parker, Lost in a Shop; Mary Cockett, Tufty; Janet McNeill,

phrasing', or bore 'little relation to the everyday experience of modern children'.¹⁰³ Series were recommended for portraying 'Everyday incidents related in successful working-class vernacular with humour and insight'.¹⁰⁴ The suggestively titled Inner Ring Readers (1964) was praised for its portrayal of a slum area and for 'introducing pleasant notes into dismal background'.¹⁰⁵ Berg's series was described as 'related directly to lower socio-economic environment ... highly relevant and interesting. Excellent for culturally disadvantaged and reluctant readers'.¹⁰⁶

These innovations and publications seem a logical outcome of pedagogical trends. The extension of the canon, the relativism implied in creative writing and the acceptance of modern linguistics all involved a challenge to the historic certainties of 'English' and all that this signified in the classroom and about class relations. Thus, it is possible to imagine working-class kids in a class where they spoke and wrote about their lives and read books reflecting those lives back at them, in turn offering models for how they might write, speak and think about that world. The likelihood of such a scenario hinges upon the extent to which progressive practices were accepted and disseminated in the state education system, as well as reactions to this work and questions about Berg's celebratory suggestion that: 'We are giving the children back to themselves'.¹⁰⁷

In an address to the NATE conference of 1967, Frank Whitehead traced a line from Arthur Quiller-Couch to Leavis and Denys Thompson, to teachers like

It's Snowing Outside, The Day They Lost Grandad.

¹⁰² Leila Berg, 'Letter: "Nippers"', Times Literary Supplement, 17 April 1969, No. 3503, p. 414.

¹⁰³ See: Teacher's Guide To Reading Schemes for Slow Learners, Child Psychology Service, Child Guidance Centre, West Bromwich, 1973 (The service was established in 1952), pp. 8 and 7.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 42.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 42.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 22.

those in his audience. The line described a varied tradition rather than a sectarian one, its consistent character found in combating outmoded ideas. Whitehead lauded the Association as the logical site of progress and the promotion of a democratic educational ideal. The problem was that: 'quantitatively it has never managed to rout the parsers, the gerund-grinders, the manipulators of linguistic hoops. What is new today is that there is for the first time a real possibility of converting this minority into a majority tradition'.¹⁰⁸ Ostensibly, his optimism was well founded. He could celebrate NATE's continued expansion, its influence on the Schools Council and lately financial backing from the Gulbenkian Foundation. Nonetheless, the teacher in his 'descent from his authoritarian dais' was faced with enormous problems.¹⁰⁹ Some of these were practical. There was a consistent and chronic shortage of English specialists available to teach the subject properly.¹¹⁰ This impacted upon the take-up of new methods, indicated in one survey of the Newcastle area in 1965. 157 of 213 schools surveyed still taught traditional formal grammar while 173 still used comprehension exercises culled from out-dated textbooks.¹¹¹ In fact, the teaching of grammar generally persisted out of habit, partly due to its certainties and that teachers liked 'something teachable' and examination boards continued to test

¹⁰⁷ Leila Berg, 'Letter: "Nippers"', p. 414.

¹⁰⁸ Frank Whitehead, 'The Next Stage', English in Education, Vol.1, No.2., 1967, p. 6.

¹⁰⁹ J.W. Creber, 'Current Trends in English Teaching: The Quest for Rigour', English in Education, No.1, Vol.1, Spring 1967, p. 9.

¹¹⁰ See Use of English Editorials *passim*. In the NATE journal a number of articles reiterated the necessary challenges of new methods and complained of the slow progress of its cause. See, for instance, W.'S. Harpin, 'Wit Whither Wilf? Some Recent Books on the Teaching of English?'; Roland Harris, 'Some Thoughts on Research and the Teaching of English' and Frank Whitehead, 'The Teaching of English in Great Britain: An Annotated Bibliography', English in Education, No.1, Vol.1, Spring 1967.

¹¹¹ Reported in Boris Ford and E.A.R. Jones, 'N.A.T.E. - The First Two Years', Use of English, Vol.XVII, No.1, Autumn 1965.

children's knowledge of it.¹¹² Even for many trained specialists there was a sense that innovative material, concerning Oracy for instance, was failing to be properly circulated to them or, due to obvious pressures, unable to be fully appreciated and acted upon. Similarly, university English departments, which produced specialists, had no real links with departments of education, let alone schools. Therefore, the further training departments that produced teachers had only a year in which to 'perform a few miracles'.¹¹³ The conclusion was that in a majority of classrooms - in English and other subjects - the implications of modern linguistics, Oracy and progressive methods had hardly registered at all.

The energy and optimistic sense of mission of some English teachers did occasion sarcasm and cynical comment from within the profession. Use of English articles were sniffed at as pastiches of real teaching, ignoring 'all the snags'.¹¹⁴ One teacher from a Madely comprehensive complained that for all of its idealism, the journal failed to acknowledge the problems of 'genuine confrontation'. The reality of secondary modern teaching meant blacking eyes and kicking behinds, as befits the noisy, dirty and disorderly children 'from homes which bear no relation whatsoever to the new school they attend'.¹¹⁵ Clearly, not everyone entered into the progressive spirit or found it worthwhile. The most telling testimony perhaps comes from the pupils themselves. A 1972 survey conducted in Birmingham revealed that for some the experience of school meant that 'We never draw anything. I hate reading and being silent'. There was certainly some disparity between the experience of primary

¹¹² Anon, 'The Excitement of Writing', Use of English, Vol. XV, No.4, p. 245.

¹¹³ Creber, 'Current Trends in English Teaching', p. 10.

¹¹⁴ A.W. England, 'The Attempt and Not the Deed', Use of English, Vol.XIV, No.3, Spring 1963, p. 157.

and secondary levels, the move up was marked by too much shouting from hostile teachers: 'Some are wicked ... they 'it you'.¹¹⁶

Rather than the enlightened and humane liberalism advocated in Use of English editorials, teachers continued to think of pupils as 'violent and libidinous workers threatening the stability of society'.¹¹⁷ Not surprisingly then, there were doubts about the likely ends of progressivism. Amongst the vanguard of English teachers, concerns were voiced at a conference in Dartmouth, USA. It was accepted that teachers were dedicated to the development of pupils as conscious individuals, but as one delegate asked 'Does our society really want such persons? Might not a slum youngster made more conscious of himself become a rebel? Might not an English teacher who helped him to discover himself be regarded as subversive?'¹¹⁸

By the early 1970s a new generation of teachers were advancing through the profession and some of them were graduates of the radical currents that came to a head in 1968 and the ferment in political and intellectual circles. A new and different tone in education was conveyed in the titles of work like Paolo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1972) M.F.D Young's Knowledge and Control (1971) Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner's Teaching as a Subversive Activity (1969) and Ivan Illich's Deschooling Society (1973). The discourse of 'deprivation' was being

¹¹⁵ Michael Cullup, 'You're No Better'n Us!', Use of English, Vol. XVII, No.4, p. 296.

¹¹⁶ City of Birmingham Education Department (Chair P.D. Neal, Headmaster Perry Common Comprehensive School) Educational Development Centre Project Five: Final Report Continuity in Education (Junior to Secondary), Educational Development Centre, Birmingham, 1975, pp. 95-99.

¹¹⁷ Charles L. Hannan 'How Can Students in Training Learn About the Differences in Social Class?', Education for Teaching, No. 76, Summer 1968, p. 710.

¹¹⁸ Herbert J Muller, The Uses of English: Guidelines for the Teaching of English from the Anglo-American Conference at Dartmouth College, Holt, Rinehart and Winstines, New York, 1967, p. 17. This key conference convened in the Summer of 1966, attended by fifty educationalists from England and America. These included (as participants and consultants): George Allen, Douglas Barnes, James Britton, John Dixon; Boris Ford, Denys W. Harding, David Holbrook, Esmor Jones; Connie and

challenged by that of 'oppression'. For some the radical implications of progressivism were obvious: 'The conditions that foster language growth are by their very nature anti-authoritarian. Liberal English teaching is more than a pedagogical idea: it is a *political one*'.¹¹⁹ Radicals in the Inner London Education Authority, and elsewhere - this was no singularly metropolitan event - proceeded in the basis that education and examination systems were 'set up by the ruling class and established in a particular way for various reasons'.¹²⁰ By 1972 over 30 'Free Schools', so-called, were established while the most celebrated event of the period perhaps, was the sacking and reinstatement of the London-based teacher Chris Searle over the publication of a collection of childrens' creative writing called Stepney Words (1971). Searle saw himself armed with a 'creative-critical principle' deriving inspiration from Marjorie Hourd's Education of the Poetic Spirit.¹²¹

The worst fears of the more conservative teachers at Dartmouth and elsewhere were realised, not in the protests of university students, but in events such as a school strike at Manchester's Miles Platting School in 1968, the organisation of the Students Action Group (SAU) in 1969 and its involvement in subsequent protests, and the establishment of the Children's Rights Conference of 1971.

Harold Rosen, James Squire, Denys Thompson, Frank Whitehead, Basil Bernstein and Sybil Marshall.

¹¹⁹ Edmund P. Clark 'Language and Politics in Education' in English in Education, Vol.5, No.2, page 102. My italics.

¹²⁰ Reported in Schools Council English Committee, English 16-19: Report of a Series of Conferences Organised by the SCEC, Schools Council Occasional Bulletins from the Subject Committes, London, 1975, p. 38.

¹²¹ See Chris Searle, None But Our Words: Critical Literacy in Classroom and Community, Open University Press, Buckingham, 1998, p.16 ff. Andy Croft indicates the obscured *party* political dimension here, that 'A fuller account of communist cultural initiatives would have to include...the evangelical promotion of children's poetry by communist teachers inside NATE and ILEA in the early 70s'. 'Introduction' in Andy Croft (ed.), A Weapon in the Struggle: The Cultural History of the Communist Party in Britain, Pluto Press, London, Sterling, Virginia, 1998, p. 3. Citing the case of Searle it is the first time that I have encountered an indication that he was a party member.

Conceived as “part of the progressive movement to change the structure of society”, SAU priorities were laid out in a six-point 'manifesto' presented in the Union's own paper Vanguard. It demanded specific changes in the school curriculum, that: 'working class studies to be introduced, including day release to get different work experience ... These courses must include the history, ideology and culture of the working class so that we can make the most of the opportunities provided by compulsory state education to mature and develop our understanding of the world and our class'.¹²² The 'revolution' in education it seems, bred real revolutionaries.

As Maurice Plaskow has commented, in the late 1960s and 1970s 'the world of education mirrored the uncertainties, the losses of familiar landmarks, the upheaval of accepted values which disrupted society in general'.¹²³ Yet in education at least, the notion of upheaval has been overdone, and many teachers were surprised to find themselves portrayed as subversives.¹²⁴ The Central Advisory Council for Education, and the Inspectors of Schools both conducted studies reporting that fears of a progressive take-over were completely unfounded.¹²⁵ Yet these fears had prompted a considerable and vocal reaction. For some, the challenges that the progressive project and the logic of its application were unacceptable, undermining

¹²² Quoted by Tyrell Burgess, 'Education', New Society, 22 June 1972, Vol.201, No.508, p. 626.

¹²³ Maurice Plaskow, 'The Life and Death of the Schools Council – A Long View From the Inside', in Maurice Plaskow (ed.), The Life and Death of the Schools Council, Falmer Press, London, 1985, p. 1.

¹²⁴ E.g., Anthony Adams. 'The National Association for the Teaching of English', Secondary Education, Vol.1, No.1, Autumn Term, 1970, p. 18.

¹²⁵ Department of Education and Science, Primary Education in England: A Survey by HM Inspectors of Schools, HMSO, September 1978, pp. 26-7, 123. See also, Neville Bennett, et al., Teaching Styles and Pupil Progress, Open Books, London, 1976.

certainities that supported and naturalised an edifice of privilege, national belief and individual self-justification.

These fears were focussed by A.E. Dyson and C.B. Cox, the editors of Critical Quarterly - another avowed representative of the estimable Cambridge tradition. If Use of English can be unequivocally identified as the enlightened, *liberal* heart of English teaching then this journal was its self-pronounced dark side. In 1967, it launched a series of pamphlets known as the 'Black Papers'.¹²⁶ Imitating governmental White Papers familiar in setting out proposals for legislative bills, the series was a rallying point and outlet for those opposed to progressivism. As Cox announced:

it is time that those of us who believe in the traditional justifications of high culture should recognize the nature of the battle in which we are involved. In education the "value-free" concept of culture leads to the belief that "correct" English, the grammar school tradition of clarity, is not superior to the vitality of working-class speech. This assumption is one curse of the dilution of English teaching today, and the reaction against spelling and grammar.¹²⁷

The impulse of progressivism, if not halted completely, was impeded thanks to the immediate influence of Cox's counter-revolutionaries, 'a triumph for the ordinary, the obvious, the instinctive and the natural over the theorists and utopians of the 1960s'.¹²⁸ In the long-term the antagonism displayed by the Black Papers towards new methods and its supporting ethos was conveyed via Lord Harris at the

¹²⁶ C.B. Cox and A.E. Dyson (eds), Fight for Education: A Black Paper, Critical Quarterly Society, March 1967. On the 'Black Papers' generally see: N. Wright, Progress in Education, Croom Helm, London, 1977, Pt. 2, and F. Musgrove, 'the Black Paper Movement' in R. Lowe (ed.), The Changing Primary School, Falmer Press, Lewes, 1987.

Institute of Economic Affairs to Keith Joseph and Margaret Thatcher, those whose policies sounded the death-knell of Welfare-State Britain, materially and spiritually. Indeed, Plaskow tells of an apocryphal moment that conveys what was at stake in debates about progressivism. On a tour of an exhibition of children's creative work, Thatcher looked at it disapprovingly, commenting tersely that "'When I was a girl, I was taught to know the difference between right and wrong'".¹²⁹

In 1960 J.H. Walsh observed that despite the burgeoning industry geared towards the production of books instructing children *how* to write, very little existed that demonstrated the results.¹³⁰ Ten years on that situation had been remedied to such a degree that David Shayer felt able to characterise the interim period as a 'decade of pupils' anthologies'.¹³¹ Whatever the value, threat or spread of progressivism, one of its achievements was registered in this accomplishment and the extent to which working-class children *were* authorised to write about their lives. In a prescient image, Steedman suggests that in the post-war years in Britain, out of all of the continuous, first-person narratives produced in society in any one day, the vast majority were those of schoolchildren. They wrote in news books, diaries and in creative exercises in primary and secondary schools.

Prefacing a lively anthology of children's writing collected by the City of Birmingham Education Committee entitled Images of Youth: Growing up in Birmingham in the 1970s (1974), Lord Mayor Marjorie Brown suggested that 'It

¹²⁷ C.B Cox. 'Editorial' in Critical Quarterly, Vol. 13. No.3, Autumn 1971, p. 196.

¹²⁸ Brian Cox. The Great Betrayal, Chapmans, London, 1992, p. 4.

¹²⁹ Quoted in Plaskow, 'The Life and Death of the Schools Council', p. 13, n. 2. See also, Clive Griggs, 'The New Right and the English Secondary School' in Roy Lowe (ed.), The Changing Secondary School, The Falmer Press, London, 1989, pp. 99-128.

¹³⁰ J.H. Walsh, 'Young Writers', Use of English, Vol. XI, No.4, Summer 1960.

¹³¹ Shayer, The Teaching of English in Schools, p.

could be that in another twenty-five years time the social historian will find these offerings of interest as original material'.¹³² There is a wealth of such material that has systematically mapped the life, thought, emotions, dreams and banal reality of those born and raised in the recent past. Yet what type of evidence is this material? As in so many of the projects surveyed throughout this thesis, we can reflect on how its was qualified by the *a priori* criteria and imperatives that impelled it, perhaps even compromising the whole logic of progressivism and creative practices.

For instance, and despite the impulse in some quarters to expand the remit of English and to appreciate children on their own terms, some aspects of the individual were unacceptable. A NATE report on the 'O'-Level examination papers of 1964 wondered whether invitations to write non-formal essays might lead to unintended responses. It gave the example of several boards that asked candidates to discuss their musical preferences: 'It would be interesting to hear how the markers reacted to the Beatles and the Rolling Stones ... no doubt, the floodgates were opened to quantities of enthusiastic, almost hysterical, bad writing, incoherent, and irrational'.¹³³ Fred Inglis suggested that whatever it was that teachers expected in children's writing, he advised against the indulgence of the 'false delights' that characterised teenage culture. While it might have been useful to understand such things, the teacher was best set in *opposition* to them.¹³⁴ In an article of 1961 in Use of English J.R. Osgerby complained that 'mass literacy' had led 'to the canalisation

¹³² Mrs Marjorie Brown, 'Forward' in Council of Birmingham Education Committee, Images of Youth: Growing up in Birmingham in the 1970s, Birmingham, 1974, no page.

¹³³ (Esmore Jones), NATE, English Examined: A Survey of 'O' Level Papers, Caversham, Reading, no date but probably 1964-5, p. 14.

¹³⁴ Fred Inglis, 'The Examining of Oral English', Use of English, Vol.XVII, No.3, Spring 1966.

of powerful individual feelings into certain stock responses'.¹³⁵ Likewise, in English in Education, D.F. Bratchell emphasised the creatively 'inert' nature of the technological age.¹³⁶

This antagonism was bound up in the Leavisite understanding of 'life'. As Terry Eagleton has noted 'spontaneous-creative life', as a term central to the Cambridge School ethos, was notoriously hard to define; except in the negative. Thus, 'in ... later stages Life evidently entailed a fierce hostility to popular education, an implacable opposition to the transistor radio and a dark suspicion that "telly-addiction" had much to do with demands for student participation in higher education'.¹³⁷

'How Free is Free Writing?' was a pertinent question asked in an article in Use of English. In spite of appeals to the essential talents of the child, it was something that needed to be *taught*, based on persuading children to abandon 'the water wings of classroom instruction and mass communications' examples'.¹³⁸ Even when children were invited to consider their own environment, free writing was clearly *not* a free, anarchic and spontaneous project, but one geared towards specific ends: 'the teacher - only unconsciously, of course - makes the pupil free of that part of his personality that overlaps the teacher's'.¹³⁹ Thus, the material produced could have a remarkably generic quality, partly due to the models that inspired it. In a book like Margaret Langdon's Let the Children Write (1961), as in many others, country topics and natural imagery predominated. Of the celebrated Marjourie

¹³⁵ J.R. Osgerby, 'Poor English', Use of English, Vol.XII, No.4, Summer 1961, p. 247.

¹³⁶ D.F Bratchell. 'Non-Specialist English Studies in Higher Education', English in Education, Vol. 5, No.1, Spring 1971, p.

¹³⁷ Terry Eagleton. Literary Theory: An Introduction. Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1989, p. 43.

Hourd and Gertrude E. Cooper's Coming Into Their Own (1959), it was noted that 'the authors were predisposed to recognise as original in children their own reflected nostalgia as cultivated by writers from Wordsworth to A.G. Street'.¹⁴⁰

Cunningham notes that in method and curriculum, progressive education in general often appeared to reject genuine popular culture and the influence of modern mass communications. It emphasised craftwork, with a bias towards the study of nature and the experience of the rural. Some teachers even resisted the use of TV in schools, attacking the 'commercialization of childhood'. Thus, if the pleasures of modern society and the identity it inculcated were inauthentic then those of previous or more authentic social formations constituted valid material for the attention of working-class people.¹⁴¹ For instance, in Use of English and several books David Holbrook advocated the pleasures and pedagogical value of traditional folk music. Indeed, the leading folk label Topic advertised extensively in the journal, offering teachers a number of free educational publications related to its catalogue. Similarly, NATE's championing of speech was predicated on a belief that 'the nation's oral tradition be used and fostered in school'.¹⁴² It suggested that 'the human race has a deeply rooted and rich oral tradition of story-telling and song, formalising its fears,

¹³⁸ Cook, 'How Free is Free Writing?', p. 42.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 43.

¹⁴¹ The Arcadian ideal, expressed in the preference for the rural over the urban is presented in Brian Jackson's 'Report from a Country School', Use of English, Vol.13, No.1, Autumn 1961. Originally published in Universities and Left Review, this explored the encounter of country-bred kids and those seconded from a RAF base. Despite their negative qualities, the former group evinces all that is good and authentic while the latter display all the inhibitions born of a familiarity with 'mass media style'.

¹⁴² NATE, English in the Primary School: Evidence Presented to the Plowden Committee, Caversham, Reading, July 1964, p. 28.

its aspirations and its experience. Schools must live in, use and nourishing this tradition for it directly serves their purpose'.¹⁴³

What then of the writing that children did produce? What kind of analysis would it be susceptible to in light of these observations? For instance, Images of Youth was the result of Birmingham City Council's invitation to a sample of the 180,000 schoolchildren in the city to reflect on their lives and environment. It is hard to imagine such a collection being produced at any other time, with its candid images of

*Toothless old men and women stand on the doorsteps surveying dirty,
bomb-terrain like streets. Brick lorries thunder along the road. The Street
is like a set of teeth, uncared for, dirty and lots of cavities. People are
half soaked and most of them are on the dole. Bone-revealing short haired
mongrels scavenging in over turned bins and litter ... It's a rats paradise'.¹⁴⁴*

Is this an example of 'authentic' writing? Has the author written from his own viewpoint, or assumed the critical eye (and snobbish tone) of Leavisism, a more general pastoralism that rejects the urban or the tone of 'working-class realism' of the kitchen-sink drama? The context for this particular material is the moment in Birmingham when the physical sites of working-class communities were being swept away and the population relocated in modern, purpose-built developments. Is there evidence here of children conscious of the limits of their world, or of the progressive impulse that informed slum clearance, celebrating a local and Utopian Modernism? As one 10-year old wrote: *'From junk and rubbish there will be a*

¹⁴³ NATE, English in the Primary School, p. 3.

¹⁴⁴ Craig Seeley, 'Slums' in Images of Youth, p. 11.

better place than this polluted place'.¹⁴⁵ Conceived as therapy, an aid to expression, or cultivation of the self, is such material 'merely' a historical document? Could it be called 'Literature'?

To ask this as a serious question is revealing in relation to negative reactions to working class involvement in creative exercises. Robert Conquest, one of the original contributors to the 'Black Papers', was specific on this point. He condemned the writing of poetry and the 'evil' of free or creative writing on the basis that children inevitably wrote badly whenever they indulged in such pursuits. Sociology was to blame, which was the bastion of a new barbarism for its comparative methods and relativistic 'philosophy'. Even worse, it had penetrated the teaching of literature, leading to the demand for 'relevance' with the result that 'Instead of teaching literature, teachers presumed to be teaching "life"'.¹⁴⁶

What 'life' meant here, I think, is considerably different to the ineffable tenet of Leavisism. Alongside children's writing, Conquest damned contemporary literature too. He complained that his wife, a teacher, had found that English teaching in her school had suffered the 'perversion' of relevance that valued this work, 'Thus, fiction about barrow boys in the Old Kent Road was regarded as the right thing to teach the boys of the area. There are obvious objections, leaving aside the basic lunacy of the whole idea ... there is no literature of even barely tolerable quality about this theme, so bad literature had to be taught in preference to good'.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Paul Hardy, 'Death of Duddeston' in *Images of Youth*, p. 18.

¹⁴⁶ Robert Conquest, 'Undotheboys Hall' in C.B. Cox and A.E. Dyson, *The Black Papers on Education*, Davis-Poynter, London, 1971, p. 67.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, page 67-8.

Something similar was at work when a study generated by the Joint Matriculation Board (JMB) and the University of Birmingham revealed a number of emergent prejudices amongst teachers about the changing definition of English. A central fear was expressed in the comment that “We don't want A-Level English to become a subsidiary of Sociology”.¹⁴⁸ Likewise, Shayer argued that a real danger of child-centered education arose when ‘exaggerated in the hands of politically-committed English teachers who also see themselves as part-time sociologists’.¹⁴⁹ He excoriated the best-selling and influential collection Reflections for its ‘trendy’ concerns and comprehension passages designed to engage pupils on ‘issues’.¹⁵⁰ These included old age, race, urban planning, working conditions and union rights, the media, crime, the atomic age, poverty, ‘with an embarrassingly obvious sympathy for all those hackneyed “nobility of labour”, “stop exploiting the working people”, “working class communities are *good* communities”, egalitarian catch phrases’.¹⁵¹ The Schools Council too, in its exploration of ‘relevant’ material, underlined the second-rate nature of anything to do with the ‘real’. The novels of Balzac, Zola, Bennett, Tressall, Wells, Mann, Orwell, Sillitoe and Naipaul were works described as overlapping with anthropology and, again, sociology, and thus ‘may not always touch the profoundest experiences of human life’.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ Ann Hurman, ‘English Study Group’, in Joint Matriculation Board and University of Birmingham Joint Project for Advanced Level Syllabuses and Examinations (Director W.A. Reid) Collected Papers, Vol. 2: Observations Reports, University of Birmingham Teaching Research Unit, Birmingham, 1975, p. 16.

¹⁴⁹ Shayer, The Teaching of English in Schools, p. 154.

¹⁵⁰ Other ‘relevant’ collections in the style of Reflections that were damned by Shayer included Gordon Lawrence Take a Look (1965); John Daniels Approaches (1965); A.Cattlkeel and H. Gardiner Outlook 14/16 (1968) and R.S. Fowler and A.J. Dick English 15/16 (1970).

¹⁵¹ Shayer, The Teaching of English in Schools, p. 154.

¹⁵² Schools Council, An Approach Through English, p. 9.

What is 'Literature', or profound experience, if it is exclusive of any discussion of social justice, racial, sexual and economic rights, family life, and topics such as authority and revolt, old age, death, drugs and sexual disease? There is no essential reason why sociological writing, or 'realism', is outside the remit of literature, or that any kind of writing could not be read for the supposedly immanent values 'cultured' people find in their favoured poetry and novels. The question of good or bad writing here is a screen for a different agenda. What 'sociology' meant in judgements like these was actually a rejection of all of those efforts to expand the meaning of English and English literature. Perforce, it was also a rejection of the democratic spirit and an expression of abiding social prejudices.

For instance, the publication of Leila Berg's Fish and Chips for Supper was attended by complaints about the robust language she employed in her portrayal of working-class life. But these complaints surely had something to do with the down-market associations of the title and general subject matter.¹⁵³ One reviewer pointed out the shortcomings of the series: 'Some children do not want to be reminded that Mum wears a headscarf at tea and that her "spit" runs down the egg when she licks it (in fact spit is not even the correct word - it should be dribble)'.¹⁵⁴ This kind of reaction, and the idea that 'barrow boys' were unsuitable subjects for literary

¹⁵³ For a fuller account, see Leila Berg, Reading and Loving, Routledge, London, Henley and Boston, 1977. The iconic and indexical status of the lowly chip should not be underestimated. The core of Lindsay Anderson's contribution to Conviction (1958) was a damning indictment of British taste: 'chips with everything'. Arnold Wesker took up the phrase in the play of the same name (1962), his upper class her complaining to the prole recruits: 'You breed babies and you eat chips with everything'. As an example of the creative writing of ordinary kids, the 'Plowden Report' chose an extract from 'A girl of modest ability' *'The smell of fish and chips/Cooking in the kitchen./The baby crying for its feed/And our old Dad reading the newspaper'*. 'The Plowden Report', para. 605, p. 220. In English in Education, K. Walsh reported on his production of a contemporary critical drama with his kids reflecting the local town's staple diet: 'Hensworth and Chips'. K. Walsh, 'The School Play Now' in English in Education (Principle and Practice -2), Vol.5, No.1, Spring 1971.

¹⁵⁴ Anon, 'Book Reviews', Birmingham Teachers Journal, Vol.21, No.3, Summer 1970, p. 3.

attention was based a pathological revulsion of the lower-classes and their appearance in literature. The presentation of people who work, their interiority, humanity, confidence, and the announcement of their collective self-worth, existence and equality, this has not generally been the stuff of Literature. That said, any idea of the 'Literary' is really to do with its associations with individual refinement, taste and cultivation. The ideal of Literature is immutable, something beyond the taint of muddy-streets and 'coarse' language, it has not been associated with social utility. Instead of having any immediate use value or reference, it constitutes a retreat from the world. As the high priest of High Culture T.S. Eliot wrote 'Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality but an escape from personality'.¹⁵⁵

From another angle however, there are further problems suggested by the idea of 'relevance' and the generation of 'working-class material' that was aimed at 'working-class children. A man of the Left like Ken Worpole objected to such material on the basis of its *inauthenticity*. In 1973, he observed how commercial publishers' lists were awash with reading schemes which, (he quotes): "are directly relevant to the modern urban working-class child" with breathless titles such as (I characterise) *The Jesmond Alley Crew Go Mugging*'.¹⁵⁶ For him, such work presented crude and 'false projections of working-class life'. Instead, kids needed encouragement to write their own stories in the context of the growth of community writing and publishing. Yet as we have seen here, and throughout this thesis, that

¹⁵⁵ T.S. Eliot. 'Tradition and Individual Talent' (1919) in Collected Essays, Faber and Faber, London, 1932, p. 21. 'But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to escape from these things' p. 21.

¹⁵⁶ Ken Worpole. 'Beyond Self-Expression: English and the Community' in Nicholas Bagnall (ed.),

there might be an authentic working-classness, and that it might be authentically and transparently represented is a highly problematic premise.

The key concern with 'relevance' was in fact the limits it imposed on those it was aimed at. One reviewer who praised the series cautioned against following the lead of 'Nippers' too eagerly: 'That working-class children have had an unfair time with reading books in which they cannot identify with the characters is a prevalent but untested assumption. Increasing the readership of large numbers of children is too important a problem for us to concentrate on only one solution'.¹⁵⁷ 'Relevance' often meant reading about work, delinquency and early pregnancies, low expectations for life reiterated in the low-expectations of their cultural ambit.¹⁵⁸ Works of fiction of working-class origin, or about working-class life, could be reduced to the status of guide to that particular world and indeed, to 'mere' sociology. We can only wonder at the way in which the 'relevant' and issue-based material thought appropriate for working class kids possibly served to reiterate the sense that they did indeed share a different quality of humanity and aspiration from that normally dealt with and provided for in the literary realm and its consumption.

If anything is certain it is that the post-war revolution in education was not timorously quiet but positively *garrulous*. It is clear that the progressive framework meant that it was inevitable that working class kids *qua* working class kids were afforded valuable opportunities for expression and self-validation. However, exactly

New Movements in the Study and Teaching of English, Temple Smith, London, 1973, p. 106.

¹⁵⁷ Anon, 'Going it Alone', p. 359. An early, albeit slight, evaluation of Berg's work and the impetus towards 'relevance' is Anne W Ellis, The Family Story in the 1960s, Clive Bingley, London, 1970.

¹⁵⁸ See, for instance: Margaret Tucker, 'Curriculum Experiment at Norwood School', English in Education, Vol.1, No.2, 1966. Kids with 'bad reputations' turned their attentions to their own lives and explored approaches to work, marriage, motherhood etc.

what working-class life or experience could be, and how it could be articulated and aestheticised was subject to competing demands and expectations.

Thus, a deep cultural conservatism existed hand-in-hand with ideas and impulses that could be turned to radical ends. Such radicalism often seemed implicit in linguistic analysis and the challenge presented by the noticeable failure of English teaching to reach a majority with its fine values. But then a number of intractable problems presented themselves to the teacher who considered himself or herself committed to the idea of the subject and to progressive methods. Creative writing and Oracy, predicated on an acceptance of the child and its cultural appurtenances, undermined the very basis of English as it had been defined. Its status as a set of rules for proper speech, as a canon of work born of a selective tradition but most of all as the guarantee of some kind of 'cultured' aesthetic experience were all subject to interrogation. Ultimately then, the very concept of working-classness, thought of as a discrete category, with its own culture and modes of representation was something at odds with the very concept of English and the 'fine' values it has represented.

Conclusion.

‘The Aesthetics of Class’

One of the motives for this thesis was Raymond Williams’ description of working-class culture as ‘a key issue in our own time’.¹ In historicising and investigating the dimensions of this issue I have sought to expand upon the way in which it is normally narrated, usually with Williams as *the* central figure. His absence here is, in part, due to the amount of attention that his life and work continues to attract. At the same time, it is difficult to find specific descriptions in his work of how and where working-class culture was an issue at large in his time, even when responding to contemporary accounts such as Hoggart’s The Uses of Literacy, or Thompson’s The Making of the English Working Class. Of course, books like Culture and Society, The Long Revolution and so on, sold well, their reception engendering much discussion amongst Williams’ contemporaries. Even when taken together, these books alone offer little detail about the extent and nature of engagements with working-class culture at large. This is particularly noticeable when considering the conjunction of a ‘whole way of life’ with the specific idea of cultural production, *viz* art, creative stories, music, film, television, songs et al. The preceding chapters and my aesthetic approach attempt to offer a fuller account of this conjunction.

Despite his absence in this thesis, Williams’ ideas underline and contribute to some of the fundamental problems involved in thinking about culture and the idealist expectations that have been involved in its theorisation and aestheticisation.

¹ Raymond Williams, Culture and Society: 1780-1950, Penguin Books, 1961 (first published 1958), p. 307.

Ostensibly, the ideas outlined in the conclusion to Culture and Society, for instance, are at odds with the aims and assumptions of many of the projects dealt with in these pages. Yet, in the same way, Williams attempts to find an *authentic* basis for a definition of working-class culture.

Critiquing a tradition of Marxist thought, Williams echoed Leon Trotsky by pinpointing the fallacy involved in prescriptive ideas about culture. If a dominant bourgeois consciousness and culture are the corollary of capitalist modes of production, he argued, then how can one formulate a socialist-workers' culture *previous* to actual socialist conditions? Furthermore, Williams complained that the 'common-stock' of cultural inheritance is more than merely the contribution and preserve of the privileged. While one group that is dominant can, by and large, control the inherited tradition in its own interests, it is subject to changes beyond any absolute control and precise material determinism. An example of such thinking for Williams is Christopher Caudwell's description of poetry from the fifteenth century onwards as '*capitalist*', 'where it remains to be shown that "capitalist" is a relevant description of poetry at all'.²

Central to this argument, I think, is a belief in the transcendent nature of cultural works. They are themselves relatively 'innocent' of sectional interest. It is merely habit and convention that suggests the manner in which they are read and how their appreciation is managed and their acquisition affords social superiority. Thus, it is a deception for anyone to believe that the value of culture is so thoroughly susceptible to influence from any political quarter. Those, like T.S. Eliot, who believed that democracy led to the disappearance of the best of 'bourgeois' culture

were as mislead as those who neglected a common inheritance in the belief that is *necessarily* undemocratic. Thus, 'The manufacture of an artificial "working-class culture", in opposition to this common tradition, is merely foolish'.³ The point about culture is that it is more than a body of intellectual and imaginative works. The distinction between upper- and working-classes on this basis is secondary, for culture is also a 'whole way of life'. The argument about the value of literary works, or art, or poetry therefore is about more than their material nature and surface phenomena: 'The crucial distinction is between alternative ideas of the nature of social relationship'.⁴ Thus, it is social ideas that govern the manner in which culture is used and the values that it signals.

For Williams, 'bourgeois' culture was defined through its relationship or association with individualism and the liberal ethos. Its 'reforming' version of the social was manifested in the idea of 'service' - which he rejected as well meant but as something ultimately serving to perpetuate the inegalitarian *status quo*. This was contrasted with ideas of communism, socialism and cooperation 'that we properly associate with the working class'.⁵ From these roots stemmed what was 'properly' meant by working-class culture:

It is not proletarian art, or council houses, or a particular use of language; it is, rather, the basic collective idea, and the institutions, manners, habits of thought, and intentions which proceed from this ... Working-class culture, in the stage through which it has been passing, is primarily social (in that it has

² Williams, Culture and Society , p.272.

³ Ibid. p. 308.

⁴ Ibid.,p. 312.

⁵ Ibid.

created institutions) rather than individual (in particular intellectual or imaginative work).⁶

This certainly underwrites the notion of proletarian art as foolish if not logically impossible. In fact, Williams eschews the 'Utopian habit' behind such work, that of predicting what the *products* of a socialist culture *would* look like. Whatever socialism might entail, he suggested, it certainly has nothing to do with the usurpation of 'bourgeois' culture wholesale, and installing in its place something drawn exclusively and purely from the consciousness and experience of working-class life. Thus, 'a culture, essentially, is unplannable. We have to ensure the means of life, and the means of community. But what will then, by these means be lived, we cannot know or say. The idea of culture rests on a metaphor: the tending of natural growth'.⁷

A problem that arises here concerns the appropriateness of this metaphor when applied to the social and 'a whole way of life'. To what degree could any historical moment or culture be considered 'natural' and how can 'growth' be measured and tended, other than on partial and predetermined lines? In fact, Williams' own sense of 'growth' favoured a particularly progressive and Utopian idea of community as the condition for a *common* culture. This is an idea that can be contrasted with that of a 'culture in common'. The latter describes the premise of the Arnoldian extension of the 'best that has been thought and said' to all in society, or the linguistic colonialism explicit in George Sampson's pedagogical tract English for the English and F.R. Leavis' prescriptions for 'more consciousness' in order to

⁶ Williams, Culture and Society p. 314.

⁷ Ibid, p. 321.

inoculate 'the masses' against their base desires. All of these positions deny that any extant culture of value already exists amongst 'the people', something that a 'common culture' accommodates and builds upon.

Here, culture is defined as the activity of *all* members of society. Traditionally, shock and objections come when in its most explicit and privileged concept and preserve of High Culture, society actively suppresses the meanings and values articulated by excluded groups, 'or which fails to extend to these groups the possibility of articulating and communicating those meanings'.⁸ No longer characterised by selectivity, the idea of a common culture posits the establishment of a notional space where *all* voices, outlooks and achievements circulate freely. It suggests a democratic terrain where 'The Great Tradition', for instance, becomes a common inheritance. Access and introduction to its understanding and maintenance can no longer be thought of as a coterie preserve: 'Related to this stress was the assertion that culture is ordinary: that there is not a special class, or group of men, who are involved in the creation of meanings and values, either in a general sense or in specific art and belief'.⁹ Culture in this framework is *simultaneously* the whole way of life of a people and those 'vital and indispensable' contributions of talented individuals.

A crucial aspect of Williams's ideas here involved challenging the educational system, inviting the participation of all in contributing to the meanings of society. And this is all very optimistic and anodyne. The apparent reason involved

⁸ Raymond Williams, 'Culture and revolution: a comment' in Terry Eagleton and Brian Wicker (eds), From Culture to Revolution: The Slant Symposium 1967, Sheed and Ward, London and Sydney, 1968, p. 29.

⁹ Ibid, p. 28.

in this line of thought and the positivism of the organic metaphor undermines any threat implied in a belief in the creation of 'a society where values are at once commonly created and criticised, and where the divisions and exclusions of class may be replaced by the reality of common and equal membership. That, still, is ... the detailed practice of revolution'.¹⁰

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that this is prescription for absolute relativism or, something more familiar. For instance, Michael Kenny has sought to distinguish Williams' theory from 'traditional' socialist discourse, which has 'implicitly sought to graft one, usually romanticised, form of community life on to the national community as a whole. In the "them" and "us" scenario of this logic, "they" would be defeated and replaced by "us" and "our" way of life'.¹¹ Kenny is thinking of how communism 'tended to impose an idealised version of the physical community on to the second dimension'.¹² Yet how different is the 'wholeness' of the communal ethos of Williams' 'whole way of life' as a basis for the vision of a 'common culture'?

Perhaps Williams' apparent difference from vulgar Marxists and other Utopians and Millennial fantasists stems from his extreme vagueness and circuitousness of argument and prose style. At times this can seem immensely angry and challenging to social and cultural injustice, yet at the same time, conciliatory and tame. Exactly *how* would a socialist society accommodate a bourgeois 'way of life'? Whether in terms of how individuals live their lives and identify themselves or

¹⁰ Williams, 'Culture and Revolution: a Comment', pp. 308.

¹¹ Michael Kenny, *The First New Left: British Intellectuals After Stalin*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1995, p. 93.

¹² Ibid.

in the elevation of the 'Great Tradition' or even the restricted version of culture: like class divisions themselves, these seem antithetical to a common culture. It is *this* ambivalence that characterises Williams as 'the product of a border community'.¹³

Nonetheless, there is something in the terms of his prescription for a common culture that will serve as a description for the wider context described in this thesis. It accounts for changes signaled in the activities of CEMA and developed after the war on a much larger scale. A desire for a common culture, and what that might mean, offers a way of evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of Williams' own work and the contribution of those figures like Ewan MacColl, Richard Hoggart, Charles Parker, Wesker, et al. As Roger Bromley comments of this generation, they 'saw themselves as engaged in transforming British society to such an extent that the cultural privilege, political power, and social authority of the class which had shaped the nation until the second world war would never again be regarded as legitimate currency'.¹⁴

All of the projects and individual efforts described in this thesis were impelled, to varying degrees, by a Utopian impulse. The index of this Utopianism related to a faith in the literally *gleaming* promise of culture as possession and as endorsement of a creative working-class agency: its expression implying social participation. This Utopianism was all the more remarkable for the way that the vision of transformation or consciousness offered in culture - individual or social - often seemed at odds with the crushing banality, even hostility, of the milieu in

¹³ Kenny, *The First New Left*, p. 92

¹⁴ Roger Bromley, 'Introduction to British Section' in Jessica Munns and Gita Rajan (eds), *A Cultural Studies Reader: History, Theory, Practice*, Longman, London and New York, 1995, p. 150.

which this work was conducted and the disparity between those they sought to address and those who they *actually* spoke to.

This issue would merit some further investigation but we have encountered on one hand, the shock of the CEMA activists in delivering High Culture to ‘slum’ people. An inverse problem for the Folk Revival was the nature of the ‘folk’ who attended the clubs and concerts and consumed and reproduced the ‘authentic’ voices of farm and factory workers. Wesker’s Centre 42 Festivals played to half-empty halls, where the most responsive of audience members were not the manual workers whose lives needed the illumination of culture but curious middle-class ones. Then there are the hundreds, even thousands of teachers, stood before the English class armed with ‘literary’ or ‘relevant’ material, encouraging the voice of those who in response might sit at the back of a class endlessly repeating ‘Bollocks’. Parker’s audiences too were those who, out of all the available modern media, would allow only ‘steam radio’ into their homes. His *intended* audience were most likely allowing their oral skills to rot while watching ‘Saturday Night at the London Palladium’ and advertisements for washing powder. Likewise for Hoggart, how successful was his attempt to reach ‘the serious “common reader” or “intelligent layman” from *any* class’?¹⁵ And Hoggart, like Williams and Thompson came out of a background in WEA teaching. In 1952 he wrote that ‘the real worker is often a rare bird in WEA classes nowadays’.¹⁶ For Thompson, teaching on WEA course entailed

¹⁵ Richard Hoggart, The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working Class life, With Special Reference to Publications and Entertainments, Chatto and Windus, London, 1962 (first published 1957), p. 9.

¹⁶ Quoted in Robert Hewison, Culture and Consensus: England, Art and Politics Since 1940, Methuen, London, 1997, p. 93.

(mostly) 'driving through fog to badly attended classes to give ill-prepared lectures'.¹⁷

Yet the object of all of this work was not just to speak *to* a working-class audience about culture and its possibilities; it was to *inculcate* its voice. When Spivak asks 'Can the subaltern speak?', the pessimistic conclusion cannot be anything but negative. Yet in this thesis we have evidence of a belief in the validity of a voice, that it must and *could* be heard. This was based upon the integrity and agency of the working class which, in Thompson's historical description 'did not rise like the sun at an appointed time. It was present at its own making'.¹⁸ For Thompson, the making and maintenance of the identity of the working class, and its political social and cultural character was an objective fact, bound up in the dialectical thrust of - 'a whole way of struggle'.¹⁹ He wrote that while 'facts will disclose nothing of their own accord, the historian must work hard to enable them to find "their own voices". Not the historian's voice, please, observe: *their own voices*, even if what they are able to "say" and some part of their vocabulary is determined

¹⁷ Edward Thompson, 1959, quoted in Andy Croft, 'Walthamstow, Little Gidding and Middlesbrough: Edward Thompson the Literature Tutor' in Richard Taylor (ed.), Beyond the Walls: 50 Years of Adult Education at the University of Leeds, 1946-1996, The University of Leeds, Leeds, 1996, p. 144. I think that there is something to be made of the uncomfortable weather and conditions in which academic and cultural work has been done and its relationship with the often puritanical reputation of those associated with it. Consider the description of the landmark History Workshop AGM of 1979, held 'in early December at ... a dilapidated and cavernous neo-classical church in Oxford, which until the late seventies had been boarded-up. "Crammed with an audience of hundreds, the temperature boosted by the biggest blow heater imaginable"'. Dennis Dworkin, Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain: History, the New Left, and the Origins of Cultural Studies, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 1997, p. 234.

¹⁸ E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1979 (first published 1963), p. 9.

¹⁹ This is his rejoinder to Williams' formulation, set out in Thompsons' review of 'The Long Revolution' in New Left Review, No.9, May-June 1961, pp. 24-33 and No.10, July August 1961, pp. 34-39.

by the questions which the historian proposes'.²⁰ Yet, as Dennis Dworkin has argued, Thompson's argument and ethos, here from 'The Poverty of Theory', ignored 'such basic questions as whether "objectivity" and "neutrality" were the same'.²¹ This is a crucial point given the politically and theoretically partisan nature of Thompson's own enterprise. Something that Pierre Bourdieu has to say about how cultural systems work applies here to the epistemological basis of 'history from below' and how Thompson 'closed his eyes to more than thirty years of work on objectivity and relativism undertaken by historians, anthropologists, psychoanalysts, literary critics and legal scholars'.²² Bourdieu writes that in order for a system to work 'those who mislead are misled, and the greatest misleaders are the most misled, the greatest mystifiers are the most mystified. To play the game, one has to believe in the ideology of creation ... and it is not advisable to have a sociological view of the world'.²³

Can the subaltern speak then? What does it mean to 'recover' histories and what kind of history is recovered? How is the voice of the subaltern to be heard when qualified by a demand that it expresses *authentic* 'working-class' experience in a 'working-class' voice? For Spivak the terms on which the subaltern speaks and is heard are always those of the dominant culture. Bourdieu, for instance, suggests that in respect of class-based politics, political consciousness is often accompanied by the acquisition of culture. This is something that affords individuals dignity and a kind of rehabilitation from their sense of inferiority. Considering the French context

²⁰ E.P. Thompson, 'The Poverty of Theory' in The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays, Merlin Press, London, 1978, p. 222.

²¹ Dworkin, Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain, p. 226.

²² Ibid., pp. 226-7

he suggests that this is a process that is often detailed in the memoirs of old labour activists. However, he writes that: 'This liberating process seems to me to have some alienating effect, because the winning-back of a kind of cultural dignity goes hand in hand with a recognition of the culture in whose name many effects of domination are exerted'.²⁴ Yet how far are these 'terms' an appropriate description of projects like Thompson's and the intentions and results of those surveyed in detail in this thesis?

The political imperative of all of the figures and projects encountered here was in some way antagonistic towards the status quo and to its definitions of the world. Even the more conservative of progressive teachers sought in some way to empower their pupils, to cultivate articulate, confident and self-respecting individuals, even when their material circumstances might indicate the opposite. As Connie Rosen wrote, 'It is necessary to understand that stories are children's methods of comment on life which they cannot make in any other way'.²⁵ However, time and again, we have encountered the way in which aestheticised versions of working-class life, being and culture, has been brought to bear on those whose outlook, life and commitment have not always accorded with the ideal. In fact the aim of folk music, or Parker's work as it became more radical, has been to inculcate the 'proper' consciousness that the working classes have either lost sight of or been cheated of through an ersatz 'mass culture'. In Wesker's cultural politics, as in that aspect evinced by CEMA's mission, working-classness was characterised by a great

²³ Pierre Bourdieu, *Sociology in Question*, Sage Publications, London, 1993 (Translated by Richard Nice), p. 138.

²⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, interviewed by Didier Eribon, 'The Art of Standing Up to Words' in *Ibid*, p. 5.

²⁵ Connie Rosen, 'The Plowden Report', *English in Education*, Vol.1, No.2, Summer 1967, p.

absence or incompleteness of parts that needed to be supplemented to make them wholly human. Richard Hoggart's descriptions of working-class life of course, were found wanting but in turn qualified particular ways of narrativising and objectifying working-class life and values, as did creative writing in schools.

Does Bourdieu's analysis extend to the wider concept of a culture *per se*, and the very differences it maintains and indeed, that he indulges? Culture clearly has a historical life, and changes in the discourse of culture, limited or extended to 'a whole way of life' suggest that this concept is itself in need of examination. Likewise, in this context at least, the category of the subaltern - the working class - is worthy of deconstruction and problematisation. It has been reproduced from the perspective of the 'dominant' and the 'subaltern' too, serving to confirm and reinforce difference as absolute and intractable, 'natural' even.

Nonetheless, the vision of working-class life and culture in these case studies is always one that is not immediately present to those who constitute the working class. The 'working class' is an object that does not know itself and is in need of guidance about how to speak and what to speak of, limiting what can be said. Ultimately, ascription of particular notions of the real, truth and authenticity in working-class expression has inhibited as much as celebrated or cultivated any possible psychology, subjectivity, desire or expression beyond a predetermined role as 'the newest class of the population actively to reach the historical stage'.²⁶ In this narrative, its part is pre-written and any deviation dismissed as inauthentic and politically redundant.

²⁶ George Ewart Evans, Spoken History, Faber and Faber, London, 1987, p. xv.

How can the work surveyed here be given its due when the problematisation of *every* category on the basis of its unexamined assumptions suggests immobilisation? Clearly, all of the cultural projects here, attendant upon the egalitarianism of the Welfare State, changed the way in which class relations were understood. They have played their part in producing the *mentalités* of liberation and egalitarianism in which working-classness has been accepted as a fact and afforded sympathetic attention and respect. Yet the resulting 'growth' and flowering of a '*new*' society has not accorded with the aims behind its nurturing by these projects. The shared Utopian project of reforging society and consciousness along idealised, even 'aestheticised' lines, has failed. This is the same for the radically progressive or the Arcadian vision, in the intention of reconciling an unequal society at a cultural level. History and the working-classes have failed to conform to their idealised roles.

Thus, is any contemporary impasse in some way a result of the enormous problems inherent in a faith in the wholeness of working-class culture as a 'whole way of life'? This is not to suggest that the aims of these projects were not laudable, nor that they have had no palpable and lasting effect. The variety of practices designed to allow the subaltern to speak, are as Steedman has observed one way of accounting for the fact that 'we are all of us now living and writing under the autobiographical injunction'.²⁷ As master narratives and 'theory' has waned, what are left are individual stories, ways of telling, sometimes following generic conventions, others testing their boundaries. Even a writer like Bourdieu, given to producing highly dense, allusive, intricately researched and presented sociologies

²⁷ Carolyn Steedman, 'Writing the Self: the End of the Scholarship Girl', in Jim McGuigan (ed.), *Cultural Methodologies*, Sage Publications, London et al, 1997, p 106.

has lately offered a considerable and unfettered collection of the narratives of the poor and oppressed that testify to 'La Misère du Monde'.²⁸ Here, and elsewhere, the personal account is now *the* realist form. It lays claim to authentic expression, experience, testimony and self-possession, a way of resisting categorisation and generalisation that would deny the individual pain in favour of the greater good.

This thesis has offered some original insights into the post-war period and the manner in which the lives, history and culture of working-class people have been imagined, celebrated and encouraged, and the particular ways in which this has occurred. This 'Aesthetics of Class' has expanded upon histories and spaces and places that have hitherto been narrated in restricted ways. Informed by contemporary anxieties and debates amongst historians and others, it has served to illuminate the various expectations and ideas imported *a priori* to the generally unexamined foundational categories of culture and class.

This thesis has emphasised the way in which concepts of culture and class can be thought of as historically specific and how they have obtained; their effectiveness and affectivity but also their limits, hinting at how and why they have appeared to wane. Gender, ethnicity, sexuality, these categories all lay claim to affect and define experience, understanding and difference, perhaps even subject to their own aesthetic demands and expectations. In this sense, the historical interaction of these areas with class would be worthy of further investigation. What is needed above all perhaps, is an investigation of the perceptions, activities and ideas of those

²⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, et al, *La Misère du Monde*, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1993 (Translated as *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society*, Polity, Oxford, 1999). See p. 170.

who were the object of the various projects and theories discussed throughout this thesis.

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